

The History of One Year

The memoirs of Gitta Simon from 1944 – 1945

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By Gitta Simon

This is what happened in Hungary in 1944-45

The "friendly" Germans, like parasites, had already sponged off the people for three years, and had settled like a plague upon the country. Wherever they put their mark, nothing remained the same. In their tracks, they left only sorrow and sadness.

The Hungarian leaders were totally under their power, but were more than happy to follow their directions against an unfortunate people, with acts intended for their total destruction.

In order to separate them from the rest of the population, Jews were forced to wear a yellow star, and were squeezed within the tight walls of the ghetto.

They had already lived for two months under the most primitive conditions; they, who only recently, had been respected and held in high esteem as fellow citizens.

The days were nerve-racking. At night, not from physical, but from mental exhaustion, everyone tumbled into bed to fall into a deep sleep, and yet without getting any rest.

There was something in the air, which made those who were stamped with a yellow star, restless. Within the ghetto walls, they huddled together in fear, in their cramped space. Everyone felt that it was only a matter of days before they would have to leave even these involuntary homes and exchange them for something far worse.

What would their destiny be? No one knew for sure. They did not dare to think about it, nor could they imagine so much malice and viciousness from people amidst whom they had lived till now, and whom they personally knew. After all, they were born here, they went to school here; here they labored together in good times and bad. They could not imagine, that they would wish the same fate for them as had already occurred to their fellow Jews outside these borders; where, like animals, in closed cattle cars, they were forced onto the road of suffering.

In the city, only doctors and pharmacists were allowed to stay with their families in their own apartments in order to fulfill their obligations towards their fellow human beings. They were allowed to walk on the streets freely, but only with the yellow star and carrying proper documentation from the police. They did their work conscientiously, and continued to heal even their enemies, because their oath and duty toward their fellow man would not allow them to act in any other way.

But the families were not allowed to leave their apartments under threat of being sent to a concentration camp.

For two days now, an unusually disquieting feeling was in the air. The doctors were being checked for their papers on the street when they went to visit patients in their homes.

While the doctors were healing patients in their offices or visiting patients in their homes, their apartments were searched by detectives under a police officer's supervision, in a most unfriendly way.

On June 29, 1944 early in the morning at 5AM, a sharp ringing of the doorbell disturbed our restless sleep. The lengthy ringing was unusual, especially at such an early hour. It was frightening. My husband jumped nervously out of bed to see who was ringing so aggressively. As he opened the door, he saw a detective whom he had treated not long before, and who had always been respectful to my husband in the past. Now, intoxicated by his power, without any explanations, he very firmly gave orders to my husband: "I will be back in 30 minutes. By that time be ready to leave your apartment and to go to the ghetto together with your family. Take with you enough food and clothing for two weeks."

With that he slammed the door behind himself, leaving my husband astounded at the strange order and this man's behavior. But the instructions were official, not open for discussion. My husband returned, deathly pale, to our bedroom, and repeated what the detective had told him.

In the meantime, the other members of my family woke up. They had been allowed to move in with us during the ghetto period. For the first few seconds, we stood in shock; confused and hopelessly in despair. How could we, in half an hour, obey the order? We were not ready to move, we had not counted on this, based on the promises by the authorities. Nothing was ready, nothing available for me to keep two families supplied with food for two weeks.

Here were my husband's old mother and his sisters; here was my sister with her family, her little children.... But there was little time for thinking! Nervously and hastily we put our clothes on and we stuffed whatever food we could find into our backpacks.

Hardly had we finished, the detective was standing there, a merciless, fatal presence, ready to take us to the clearing station. Our apartment was closed with an official seal.

My poor mother-in-law, how tired she was! My sister's dear little children, how frightened they looked, as they were led down the steps, with wide open eyes and with their little backpacks; without a word, down through the corridor, accompanied by the superintendent's sarcastic look. He was probably making sure that nobody stayed behind.

Our little dog seemed to have sensed the sorry fate of his masters and was following us slowly.

Our sad little group left the house where we had been unbelievably happy together. The door closed behind us. It seemed like our whole life was closing behind us.... Our little group walked along the street quietly, sadly, without a word. Our little dog was running back and forth, to my little niece and to my little nephew to rub against them and then to us grownups. We tried in vain to send him off, he would not leave us. He faithfully followed his masters.

We met with more sad little groups like ours, on the street. All doctors or pharmacists with their families, who had been promised that they would be left in peace to do their work.

They were big on promises though they knew that they would not keep them. All action was carefully thought out and planned in advance. Unfortunately, we found out only too late!

This is how we arrived, between the rows of bayoneted gendarmes in the street, and in the custody of the detectives, to the schoolyard in the ghetto. We stepped through the gate. Here were almost all the doctors and pharmacists of the town together with their families. With troubled expressions, they glanced greetings at each other. Nobody knew why all this was happening.

Here they gathered those who had not been forced into the ghetto previously. The other unfortunate ones were waiting for their fate within the walls of the ghetto.

We waited for hours in the strong June sun. Like the others, we put our backpacks on the ground and sat on them. The anxious, silent, pale crowd looked like a condemned band of prisoners who were resting before they embarked on an unknown, dangerous journey. The innocent little children seemed to feel their parents' desperate anxiety and were playing silently near their parents.

Quietly talking to our friends, we asked each other: "What will happen to us? Why all this? What kind of fate have they assigned to us, these scoundrels who have cast aside all human emotions?"

The quiet talk was interrupted by a group of bayoneted gendarmes marching into the schoolyard. Deadly silence and fear came over all of us. Everyone felt that the time had come when no one could remain master of his own fate. From this moment on, we knew that we were prisoners. In front of us, behind us, and all around, there were bayoneted gendarmes.

Only now did we become aware that there was no escape. We were at the mercy of a heartless and irresponsible gang. We did not know why we had to suffer in this way. With wide frightened eyes we huddled together. Everyone hugged his own family: old parents, little children looking for protection and with imploring eyes searched their parents' faces. My sister's little children hid themselves next to us and held our hands as if they felt that someone wanted to take them from us.

A few minutes later, things started stirring. The gendarmes gave orders that unmarried doctors and pharmacists were to report to forced labor work. They left the school area. There were only a few, and with mixed feelings and tears in their eyes they said goodbye to their loved ones.

The rest of us kept waiting, almost without thinking, totally dazed, hoping for a miracle, hoping for a word that it was a mistake; that what was happening to us here was not true.

We were still standing side by side with my husband's and my sister's family, when some of the gendarmes marched past us right into the school, where they sat down at big tables. Then one by one they called on the unfortunate people present to come in with their valises, backpacks and other packages for inspection. Unfortunate men, women and children! They took everything apart, scattered everyone's belongings all over, without exception; these unscrupulous armed bandits.

They took everything that might be useful. They took money, jewelry, watches, clothing, food; anything that they believed was too good for us prisoners.

For my sister's children, I had hid away a small piece of chocolate in the bottom of my backpack; they found it and took it away. My little niece, fearfully, hugged her favorite doll, when a gendarme noticed it and went over to the little child and tore away the doll from her little hand, saying that a Jewish brat doesn't need a toy. The poor little child cried bitterly, as terror-struck and with tearful eyes she watched how they threw her treasure into the corner. We were hardly able to console her. We had to suffer through this without a word, thinking of the near future, what else was waiting for us? After they had stolen everything, they pulled our wedding rings from our fingers.

Now that they had taken all useable things from us, they ordered all women, regardless of age, both young girls and married women, to be body-searched, with the vile accusation that we may be hiding valuables in our body cavities. Deeply humiliated, some of us with ashen faces, others with beet-red faces, afraid of the brutal gendarmes, felt compelled to follow their directions. This time everyone felt that it was only the beginning of our misery.

I will never forget when one of the most respected doctor's elderly father collapsed during the examination. His death rattle, as he lay on the floor came to the attention of one of the gendarmes who came over to the dying man in order to search his pockets. He was turning him back and forth to check whether he may be hiding some valuables. He even pulled his pants down. His son was standing helplessly next to his dying father, forced to watch how they mistreated his unfortunate parent.

It was late afternoon when the gendarmes finished their unsparing work. The poor unfortunate families, driven from their homes, who deserved a better fate, were sitting under the hot June sun in the school-yard, which no longer was filled with happy and carefree children's hearty laughter.

We sat there, filled with worry, wiping the sweat, and waited for the gendarmes' orders. Slowly, smaller and larger groups were selected from us. They stood us in lines of five: old, young and children. They marched us through the busiest streets under armed guard.

As we passed a church, we met up with a wedding party. What an irony of fate! Right next to me walked the chief of medicine of the hospital. With bitter humor he stated: "This is a good sign. This is an omen that everything will turn out well in the end." He trusted, he still trusted in his fellow man's humanity.... The wedding party passed by us happily and without concern. We, on the other hand, kept going, as if being taken to our place of execution between the tightly packed rows of curious onlookers.

This gazing hoard of onlookers probably never thought of how many of their lives had been saved by those that they, without a second thought, allowed to march through the streets, like murderers, under the fixed bayonets of the gendarmes.

Our little dog kept following us. He was aware that we must be in big trouble. Perhaps he wanted to help us, perhaps to save us. Perhaps he knew that the people's viciousness and meanness had no limit.

Finally, our procession arrived at the artillery barracks. They brought us inside through a large grated gate. Our little dog followed closely behind. The gendarmes could not stand this, they wanted to chase him away, but he would not go. My little niece took him in her arms, took him back to the grating, where our old loyal employee stood, who since the ghetto system had been established, was no longer able to work for us, but always followed our fate; even now he followed us on our sad journey. He stood by the grating and took the dog to take care of him.

The gendarmes assigned us a stable as living quarters. That was the place where we had to live from then on. The hay in the horses' resting place was still warm from their breath.

This is where we lay down, dead-tiredthe old, the young and the children.

We no longer asked each other what would happen next. Now that we had lost our freedom, it seemed our brain had stopped functioning. We were totally helpless. This loss of freedom, and the way it happened, unsettled all of us to such a degree, that we became totally lethargic.

The others followed us, including the ghetto inhabitants. Slowly the stables and barns filled with people. Then came the countryside's unfortunate victims. For them, not even the stable was available. In the open square, under the open sky, they put down their remaining baggage. They remained like this night and day: sometimes standing, sometimes crouching, sometimes lying down.

By now the situation had lasted for days. Everyone was eating what they had brought with them. Those who did not have food were able to get a plate of soup from the improvised soup-kitchen. But the people helped each other. They felt a great closeness to each other. The fear and the hopelessness brought the people together. They were patient with each other.

The camp lacked the most primitive sanitation conditions. There was no place for five thousand people to have privacy for their physical needs. Everything took place in front of everyone else. Perhaps that was the worst that they could do to a civilized person. Cleaning possibilities were also greatly limited.

But there was something much worse than these humiliations. The fear of torture!! From Pest they sent down detectives who interrogated these wretched prisoners, using torture, to find out where they had hidden their jewelry, their silverware and their money. Every night they collected their prey among the stigmatized. They were beaten mercilessly. They twisted their limbs, they ran electricity through them, to obtain confessions from them and to rob them of possessions that they may have buried or hidden away in the event one of them might return to start over again.

It made no difference if they were young or old, those who fell under the interrogator's hands came out human wrecks. By now, everyone was imploring God that they would rather go into cattle cars than continue to be tortured. To be loaded into wagons was considered a lesser evil for these unfortunate tortured people.

We did not realize that this was only the beginning of the end.

Meanwhile they brought from the hospital the newly operated patients, the midwives, the mentally ill and finally, on stretchers, the dying. They would not even allow them to be put to their final rest in their own homeland.

The cattle cars had arrived. We finally realized that we had believed in miracles in vain. There was nothing that could save us from being taken away, not even the air raids that were happening during this time. Everyone held their breaths as they watched the falling bombs. The walls of the stable swayed from the blast of explosives. The poor little children sobbed as they clung to their mothers, and their whole bodies shook in fear. At the time, no one knew how much suffering a direct hit would have saved them.

The bombs had hit the railroad station next to the artillery barracks, the warehouses next to the station, and the railroad flats. Unfortunately, the rails remained intact. It was the only thing, that in case of a direct hit, would have delayed the wagons from leaving. They started to load the poor victims into the freight cars. The freight car windows were covered with dense wire screens. Into these wagons, we unfortunate ones, were driven, like cattle, by the bayoneted gendarmes. Seventy five to eighty persons into each wagon. It was all the same to them: old, young, children, sick or healthy. They packed us in so tightly that we could hardly move. Into each wagon they put two empty pails and two pails with water. Everyone could take a little package, which included perhaps a little food, so that at least the very old and the very young would not suffer as much from hunger during the trip. My dearest sister with her family, and my sisters-in-law, were separated from us; they forced them into separate wagons.

I can't describe my feelings as I was climbing onto my assigned wagon. Why could I not be with my family during this difficult journey? They had promised us that doctors, together with their families would get hospital assignments. We had believed them!

They closed the wagon doors, they even put padlocks on them, to make sure that none of us would escape. I could not get over the terrible depressing feeling caused by the dark confining wagon. The train started slowly, then clattered ever faster, almost as though someone or something was chasing it. Inside the closed wagons, we were tormented and suffering from lack of movement, hunger, heat and thirst.

How the mothers suffered, having no way to soothe their children, to quench their thirst or to fill their hungry little stomachs.

In the hospital wagon, the old, the sick, at first endured their suffering in silence; later some of them became deranged. They shouted all the time. They wanted to go outside. They walked over the bedridden to get to the door. They were terribly strong. My husband and a nurse, who happened to be in the wagon, could hardly control them. Some of them committed suicide. They were the lucky ones, they no longer felt anything.

At the border, they opened the wagon doors.... not due to human kindness, but so that a gendarme colonel could ruthlessly and roughly search his victims one more time for gold, money and jewelry. Then they closed the wagon doors. For a moment, the chains on the locks clanged, then silence once again. The train started once more, taking its sorry load to arrive on the third day, late in the evening at Auschwitz. At the time the place was unknown to any of us.

Deep darkness. From somewhere nearby, crying and shouting was heard. The doors were still closed. The unfortunate prisoners, packed tightly like herrings, without food or water for days, in deadly fear, were waiting for the doors to open so they could at least get some fresh air. No one could guess what would happen next.

The air raid warning sounded. Up in the air, English or Russian planes were circling, so they could observe the scene where so many hundred thousand unfortunate human beings were suffering and the place of their death. An hour later, the planes departed. A reflector was turned on. Its light shone into the wagons. The closed cattle cars were opened. A beastly shouting voice was heard: "Everybody leave the cars; leave everything behind. Only the doctors may carry the medical bags they brought with them."

The miserable people, women, children and the sick, who had been inside the closed wagon for days, staggered while trying to stretch their numbed limbs, as they climbed down the stepless wagons. They could not even look around before they were separated, some to the right, some to the left. Their destiny had been sealed.

Arrival in Auschwitz

It was a dark and starless night. The reflector light lit up the wagons sharply. The unfortunate people had been locked up in the dark wagons for days. The unaccustomed bright light blinded them, dazed them, and they went in the direction where Dr. Mengerle pointed them. The poor souls, like sacrificial lambs, unknowingly followed the road assigned to them. No one knew as yet which road led to what fate.

They separated the families. They separated the men from the women, the young from the old, the mothers from their children. At the time, no one guessed the Germans' diabolic plans.

Mengerle divided the families, and in answer to their pleading to allow the families to stay together, with a smile on his face, this beast in human skin put them at ease by promising that they would meet again the next day. With this, perhaps, he tried to avoid an outbreak by a desperate people. The Germans liked to finish calmly their vile work.

Every move of theirs, every promise, was nothing more than deception; misleading lies and delusions. What happened to the poor people who were directed to the left, their families only found out a few months later.

Those who were pointed to the right had to stay in line on a dark road, bordered on both sides by a row of barracks. They stood in line for a long time without a word; they were still perplexed by the happenings, tired from the long torturous trip, embittered by the separation from their dearest ones. Only the promise that they would meet the next day with their loved ones, gave them a little strength.

We too climbed down from the wagons; I helped my poor mother-in-law down, then arm in arm we took a few steps till an S.S. soldier roughly pushed me from her and made me go to the right.

I looked back and saw the poor woman start slowly to the left. I had such a troubled feeling, unconsciously I sensed the fate awaiting her. Meanwhile, for just a moment, I saw my husband standing in a group with my brother-in-law, who shouted to me and signaled to find out in which direction my sister had gone with her little children. Perhaps because I was still dazed, I did not fully understand his signaling, but because an S.S. guard repeated orders to move on, I hurried after my companions.

My acquaintances and friends were already standing in line in the unlighted dark road, while I was still asking in desperation about my sister. Nobody saw her. When the situation permitted, I called out her name. There was no reply.

I had never in my life felt the extreme anxiety, the physical pain, as then, when I could not find my sister and her little children whom I loved so dearly. My friends needed to support me, I almost collapsed from the pain of the separation. I did not know at the time, nor could I imagine, that it would be forever.

The row of people was getting longer and longer. As they opened each wagon and separated the families, the line grew. Finally they started the march under the watchful eyes of the S.S. soldiers. The group proceeded slowly and quietly along the dark road; everyone preoccupied by her own sad thoughts.

When we left the row of barracks in the far distance, we noticed a square enclosed by leafy trees, and in the center on a platform, a bonfire was burning. In the dark night, these red tongues of flame seemed like horrible ghostly reminders, everyone shuddered with horror. Some seemed to believe that they were seeing a terrifying vision and shouted in desperation: "Look, they are burning humans." I do not know if they were not close to the truth.

The ones with stronger nerves, or who still could not believe that humans could be capable of such viciousness; by gesture and word told them that they were only burning the rags removed from the wagons.

The weaker ones got sick with fear, they had to be supported by the others. The march continued under the watchful eyes of the S.S. soldiers. We were totally enervated. Only our yearning for our separated families kept our will to live alive. The road seemed unending. Dawn was breaking and we were still walking. Finally, we arrived at a brick building built at a right angle. This was the so-called disinfection station. That's where the march stopped.

In groups of fifty they directed the women and girls into a stone floored hall, where Polish prisoners, dressed in stripes were working around steam kettles. In the hall, S.S. soldiers walked back and forth as if they had something very important and urgent to do.

We, women, just stood; standing feverishly in fear, tortured by thirst since we had had nothing to drink for days. We asked the Polish prisoners for a little water. They kindly, secretly, gave us little pots to drink, until the S.S. soldiers found out and stopped them. After this, they watched them carefully, to prevent this from being repeated.

The anxious quiet was interrupted by a shouting woman's voice: "Alles auszihen" (Everyone undress). We looked at each other in shock. Why? Why do we have to undress? Why in front of the soldiers who were walking back and forth?

We had hardly recovered from the first surprise, again that horrible voice: "Alles ausziehen, sonst werdet ihr noch etwas erleben." (Everyone undress, or you will experience something new). I was wondering how such an immense rough voice could come from a woman's throat. After the second command, everyone, frightened, started to throw off their coats, dresses, underwear, and here we stood stark naked, among the men as they walked back and forth. In time, the undressing occurred so often that we became indifferent.

Now the same voice gave an order that all clothing be left on the ground, we could however take our shoes with us. Then they called upon the young girls. Those under 15 years of age were to stand on the other side of the hall, they would meet their mothers after the bath. This was another deception. These poor children were totally torn away from their mothers. None of the children from this transport returned alive. Their fate was no longer in question.

Two at a time, with shoes in our hands, stepped into another room; where two women roughly stopped us by shouting "hands up". Their voices were just as brutal as the other woman in the hall. With clippers in their hands, they jumped on us, and wherever they found even a small amount of hair on our bodies, they cut it off; sometimes so roughly that many exclaimed in pain.

After this unusual treatment, the confused victims, directed by a hand sign and a "go on", were shown to another room.

Here another surprise was waiting for us: As wool from the sheep, that's how they shaved the stunned women and girls' hair from their heads, one after the other. As they watched their falling locks, there was one who asked the woman why she was doing this. In answer, she got such a tremendous slap in the face, that she almost fell down.

All of us silently watched this scene, we stood terrified with our legs rooted to the ground. What would happen after this? For this was only the beginning.

These seemingly rough women, on the other hand, were also deportees who had suffered for years in this terrible place where before their eyes, relatives had been tortured and destroyed. Only by pure chance were they still surviving. Their will to live had taught them that in this place, only those could live and succeed, who could match their jailers in roughness, cruelty and meanness toward their fellow prisoners. In time they did not notice their own behavior, it became second nature to them. Actually one could feel sorry for them. Based on their actions, one could conclude that they were no longer normal. The years of suffering left terrible imprints on them, and those who knew their tribulations and experiences could not be surprised at their behavior.

Then we were shown to a room filled with showerheads. At the front of the room, a trough on the floor was filled with dirty water. Into this so-called disinfected water, we had to put our shoes until we had finished with our showers. Everyone stood under the showers, they turned the water on for a minute, then while still wet, we had to put on our dripping wet shoes. The events followed fast, one after the other, so fast that before we even realized it, we were in yet another hall, where everyone received a shirt and a dress. We had to put this on regardless of whether it was too tight or too loose, too long or too short. The bald heads and the terrible fitting clothes made the women unrecognizable. They did not recognize their own sisters, children or friends. Everyone looked like a boy, with ears sticking out. Or else, we looked like a crowd of ragged beggars in the hall. Everyone looked at each other with wide open eyes, then at themselves.

Only a few hours earlier, our dresses though rumpled from the wagons, looked decent, and now we could not even be recognized. It was a sorry sight to see: these women and girls who had known better times.

Outside, we waited for the other groups, until they came out with their changed appearances. From here they led us to a square, where we stood helplessly in the hot scorching sun which burned our bald heads. A woman supervisor came and stood the captives in lines of five. This was the usual procedure during our stay in Germany. Always and every time, this line of five was used to stand in line for many hours. We now stood for hours under the scorching sun.

We were hungry and thirsty. We had no water. The heat of the sun was unbearable. We were suffering a lot. The way we were tormented by thirst was perhaps worse than our suffering from hunger and was awful to see. When the mouth contains no moisture, the tongue has a thick white foam on it, which is dry and tormenting. The upper lip, due to the dryness, sticks to the gums and the teeth stick out as though one is smirking. Many had collapsed, and many raved continuously, as in a trance.

All of a sudden, someone noticed small muddy puddles on the ground, left from the previous day's rain. We ran to the puddles, and with our hands took the dirty water into our mouths, and noisily drank it as though it was the best beverage we had ever had. Then we tore a piece off our questionably clean shirts and dipped them into the water and put them on our heads in order to cool our bald heads. Finally the water was used up.

The sun was high in the sky when two women approached with a large kettle. Two others pulled a pushcart laden with sand colored brick shaped objects, which we later found out was bread.

This reminded me of a fable from my childhood about unsweetened cake baked in ashes. For some reason the color of the bread reminded me of how I had imagined it as a child.

Someone shouted: "Looks like they are going to feed us." Everyone was very hungry, and with bulging eyes and open mouth, they fixed their gaze on the kettle. We waited....when would they distribute the meal? They brought out battered pots and pans. We could not imagine why. Soon we found out. They gave a container to every line of five, and the person standing at the edge of the line had to approach the kettle. They measured with a one liter ladle. Impatiently we were waiting for the others. The hunger tortured us.

Finally the person on the edge returned with the pot; smelling the food, grimacing with her nose. It was not very encouraging. In her other hand, five little slices of bread. Everyone looked at the contents of the container, but nobody was brave enough to eat from it. The smell was so bad that you could get sick from it. It contained from grass to everything else that was not intended for human consumption. We were nauseated by it. And despite our terrible hunger, no one dared to touch the food.

Only later, a fellow block member, who probably had been here longer, warned us that we must eat. You must eat everything they give you or you will starve to death. With this warning, we tasted it. After the first taste, we spat it out. We were unable to swallow it. We tasted the bread also, which contained hardly any flour. It was mostly finely sifted sawdust. We were very bitter. We were hungry and yet we could not touch anything. We lost our appetite on the first try. We were still too used to the taste of homemade meals.

We were dispirited and tired. We sat on the ground and exhaustedly waited to see what new surprises were coming our way. In the late afternoon, again they lined us up, five to a line. They brought a small table and chair from somewhere; one woman wrote down the names of the prisoners, their occupations and ages. Then she counted the group. This action was called "cel-apel". Nobody knew the meaning of the word, but all through our stay in Germany this word followed us. Everything turned around this. Standing hour after hour, and not being allowed to talk during that time; not even to move until the counting was completed.

When they registered the results of the counting, the block leader led us toward the barracks. When we arrived to the assigned barracks, the block leader said: "Everybody find a place on the floor, lie down and sleep. In the morning you have to get up early."

The tired, thirsty and hungry crowd just fell on the floor, not even feeling the hardness of the floor or the missing blankets. The space was tight. Tightly next to each other we lay or sat. The space was so tight that, if in a line, one had to turn, then the whole line had to follow the movement. Finally we found our place and fell asleep. We slept deeply and without moving.

It was still dark. In the sky the stars watched the earth with weary eyes; where people lived, where there was no limit to hate and meanness. Where the unprotected were exposed to limitless and unreasonable hate, where so many people suffered and became the sacrifice of these circumstances.

It was still dark, when a voice shouted at the barrack door: "Every one up!" Everyone sat up; still sleepy, we rubbed our eyes. In the first moment we did not know where we were; then came the second yell: "Everyone out for the cel-apel". Everyone ran quickly toward the exit.

We stood in line in front of the barrack and waited. It was still dark. It was about 3 o'clock in the morning. It was very cold; we shivered in our rags, almost numbed by the cold. However, we had to stand for hours without moving. We could hardly stand from weakness. If the block leader looked away, we squatted for a moment on the protruding sharp rocks, on which they forced us to stand for hours every day. This was part of the torture intended for the prisoners.

It was about 7 o'clock in the morning, when the block leader would count the number of us present. Then came a woman soldier who checked the numbers. When this was done, they brought the kettles with scorching black coffee, which though it had no resemblance to coffee, was nevertheless black and warm.

The pots were filled and everyone could drink. And we drank because we were thirsty and cold. If they had brought hot water only, we still would have drunk it gladly.

Then rest time. We needed it, after the many hours of standing, like chicken and geese in the barnyard. We looked for a small sunny place, where we leaned against each other to keep each other warm until the sun's charitable rays had its effect.

Around noon they brought the kettles again. Day after day, the food was the same inedible horror. After many days of starvation, out of necessity, we were able to eat the food. If we had had to chew pieces of wood, we would have done it, since we were so famished.

The weather itself became part of the torture. At night numbing cold. Sleeping on the bare floor without blankets.

For pillows, some used their arms, others their shoes, if they were brave enough to remove them, if they were not afraid that under the cover of night, someone would take them.

There was a great shortage of shoes. The shoes fell apart and there was no replacement. Many went barefoot, consumed with cold, and obtained whatever and from whomever they could without consideration for their fellow prisoners.

The sleeping places were so confined and tight that even in the corridors of the barrack, the deportees slept densely together. They were exposed to the howling wind and beating rain through the glassless window openings. Many got sick and suffered a lot without nursing and medicine.

One day I myself felt very weak and feverish. Since my friend and I were lying in the corridor of the barrack, I asked her to let us move to one of the rooms, where we might find ourselves a little space and which was warmer and more closed to the elements than the corridor. We went inside, in other words we dared; we lay down close to each other; we only took up less than half a meter width of space. From the weakness, I fell asleep immediately, but only a few minutes later our barrack-mates came in.

If until now it had not come to my attention, it became shockingly evident how people forget themselves in these sad circumstances. It came out as limitless self-centeredness and rudeness. Probably the will to survive above all else, brought out these qualities. The bully always wins and the weak one must let go.

As soon as they noticed us on the floor, they started to shove us, sometimes with elbows, sometimes with their legs. They saw that I was not feeling well, but they couldn't care less.

"Go to your place, where you were yesterday," they said. My friend and I did not say a word. We propped ourselves up and moved back to the corridor. However our place had already been taken. We were the weaker ones, therefore we let them lie there. We had no space. In the pitch dark, we felt our way among the reclining ones and came to a side corridor which only had window openings.

The wind was howling, crisscrossing the corridor. The rain poured in. The floor was full of water. We almost fell down from weariness. We lay down beneath the window, no longer caring what would happen later. Early next morning, I opened my eyes, I saw movement but I could hear nothing. I could not understand what was happening here. I saw mouths moving as expected during talking, but there was no sound. I turned to my friend, and asked what was happening here? That's when I realized that I had become deaf.

I had a horrible headache, my brain was throbbing, I had a fever. On my friend's advice, I got up in order not to miss the standing "cel apel". Then I went to sick call. I thought that with a little painkiller I would be able to survive this as well.

The doctor I turned to, also a deportee, gave me half an aspirin. The poor doctor herself, did not have medicine. She responded to my complaint by stating that this was a lager sickness. It frequently happened here in this form.

With this, I went back to my friend who turned out to be a good and loyal friend. She helped me as much as she could. She stayed next to me and would not allow me to go to the hospital to lie down, not even when she saw how much I was suffering with my ear, for as it later turned out, I had a middle ear infection. Many of us suffered from this illness. If nature did not help by bursting open the infection, then one would die from the large amount of pus, and in absence of proper treatment.

We did not dare to go on sick call, because we were afraid of the shadow of the gas chambers. Rather, we lay on the bare, dirty, often times muddy floor, without any covering. I frequently leaned against the wall, without a word or movement, tortured by monstrous pain, in order that I would not be in the way of others. It took many weeks until nature helped me.

Then, almost everyone, without exception, suffered from diarrhea from the dreadful food. This too was almost unbearable; there were no available toilets. For every three or four barracks in an open area, only eight to ten buckets, placed into wooden boxes, were made available for our needs. Everybody had to use them. Since this was not sufficient, ten to fifteen people were waiting their turn, in front of each box at all times. Jumping from one leg to another, in order to bear the waiting. The waiting and in order to spend the time better, gave an opportunity for conversation. During this time, the place grew into an information center. The most impossible news was given to each other. We debated it, discussed the possibilities, then we passed it on to the block at night when we lay down. Everyone was waiting for the so-called latrine news, and we were happy if we heard good news and were able to share it with the others: the coming liberation, the approaching Russians, the end of the war, and in one instance, the attempt against Hitler's life. We were so full of hope that this attempt had been successful. These news items gave us a small interest in life, a small hope in our otherwise forever worsening state of mind.

The most unpleasant situation was when you had to go at night but you could not. For that purpose, at the end of the corridor, in a small empty spot, two or three pails were placed, for the thousand to fifteen hundred people who slept in the barrack. At night, when the urge made us want to run, we were only able to grope our way through the sleeping people in the dark corridor. We stumbled sometimes into a head, into a leg, into a body, and from those awakened we got such a push, or kick, that we were knocked down forward or backward.

When finally, we were able to get up and get to the designated place, surely often it was too late. Going back, we had to run the same gauntlet. The worst of it was that we would find our place occupied, which did not take much: only that the two persons, on either side had to slide together ten centimeters each. They probably did not even notice it. Again, we had to fight for our little space, where we could find room. This is how it went, without exception, day after day, week after week.

The days were no better than the cold restless nights. As benumbing as the nights and early mornings were, that's how hot the blazing sun was during the day. The whole area was desolate. Nowhere a tree, that would give a little shade. The barracks were off limits during the day. We were forced to stay under the shadeless blazing sun all day. The sun was so strong that it blistered our legs, our hands, our faces in such a way that it rendered us unrecognizable. We could not keep the blisters clean; they gathered pus which spread throughout our bodies. How much the women and girls suffered can not be imagined.

Once while I was waiting in the sick bay, thinking that if I was lucky I would get a small painkiller, I was witness to a sad happening. The examination room was filled with woman doctors and an SS soldier who checked in from time to time. The only medications, bandages available came from deportee doctors, which had been taken from them by force and based on promises that they would be able to practice medicine. These items were running out and had no replacements.

The room was full of sick people. What terrible types of wounds you could see!!!!.... All the way to the bones. I saw a very young girl whose whole breast, in fact her whole body was full of wounds. I will never forget how a woman doctor hid the child so that the soldier would not notice her and note it down. The doctor practically mummified the whole child with paper bandages.

Then came the other seriously ill patients: nothing but skin and bones, suffering from diarrhea, and lack of vitamins rendered many so weak, that they could hardly stand.

And the truck, like a final fate itself, appeared every night. The people with infectious diseases were undressed and thrown naked onto the truck, along with the dead and dying; then the truck would leave with lightning speed, without leaving even dust behind. Everyone guessed that they would not even bother to separate the living from the dead.

The shortage of water was terrible. Approximately ten thousand people did not have water in B. lager. Every day except on Sunday, they brought two containers of water into a tank. At such a time, the prisoners in the vicinity would gather like an invasion of locusts. But they could hardly get to the water. An SS soldier who came with the containers, would use a dog whip to beat the thirsty ever increasing crowd, who had elbowed their way to the water, so that they could, with their small jars and pots, fetch a small amount of water for themselves.

They did not mind the beating, which they preferred to the pangs of thirst. From the small amount of water, collected in the containers, they took some for the sick bay and to clean the barrack floors, and in less than 15 minutes, the tank was emptied.

Using the water for washing up was out of the question. Days later, one of the prisoners, during an incursion, found a reservoir somewhere. It was some distance from the barracks. From then on, we watched while they changed the guards, so that we could use the time to smuggle small amounts of water for cleaning up. We had to fight for everything.

It very often rained. At those times we were allowed to stay in the barracks. But the prisoners did not have much joy in it. The tops of the barracks were covered with regular wooden boards. The rain poured in through the openings between the boards. The prisoners would stand in groups in a seemingly protected area, however the water did not have any regard from them; it used every little space to get in.

Finally it was as though we were standing under the open sky: we were as wet as a prairie dog in a flood. But this was not the only problem.

From the outside of the barracks, we brought in our shoes and wooden boots, covered with wet clay-laden soil which filled the floor of the barrack with muddy clay. In the evening, we lay down on this dirty, muddy floor, because under the circumstances, there was nothing else we could do.

One can imagine how our rags looked because nobody could take off their clothing. Otherwise we would freeze to death without any covers. Frequently, our clothes were not taken off for weeks. If someone dared to take her shoes off, she would use them as a headrest. Under these circumstances, we would pull our legs up to our stomachs, so that we could cover them with our skirts.

In the meantime, the deportees also worked. They carried bricks; they lugged bricks of grass which was used to plant the front of the barracks. The pails, used for toilets, were carried and emptied into a pit. From there, every day, from the men's lager, they came with a cart, pulled and pushed by men. This function was reserved by the Germans for people who possessed a university diploma, as a special mission, and they emptied and filled the carts with human waste.

Almost daily, inhabitants from the men's lager carried bricks, tools, planks and logs from one place to another, close to the women's lager. Under such circumstances, the women, with longing glances, watched anxiously to see if their relatives were coming.

What happiness when they sighted and were able to speak a few words with each other through the wire fence. This happened a number of times. The women, already in the early dawn hours, as they stood for "cel apel" hoped, and were happy in advance, that they might see their husband, son or father that day. All day we would watch the road excitedly from where they usually came.

One day, as we were waiting, you could see the moving figures. They came closer on the road. One woman recognized her husband and ran toward him. At this moment, as if he were watching out for this, an SS soldier ran out of the sick bay and with his whip, attacked the husband, an older man. A very young girl, seeing this, jumped out to protect the older gentleman; the soldier turned on the young girl and beat her many times on the head with his whip. The skin on her head split open, and at once blood gushed out. Later we had to revive her with water and stitch up the wound.

From then on, they would not allow the men to come over. They would not even allow us this small drop of happiness, to see our relatives. During the standing at "cel apel", punishment was the order of the day. You were not allowed to speak or move for hours. In light of the terrible food, the diarrhea increased proportionately. They probably put something in the food to further torture us. Many perished as they were overcome by weakness, and hearts stopped functioning under the circumstances.

With such "cel apel" standing, which took about one third of the day, surely it was not easily possible to hold back our biological functions.

Once a woman and her two daughters suffering from stomach cramps, ran out of the line together, so that they could take of their needs. The block captain immediately noticed this and ordered them back. He made them kneel down with their hands over their heads for hours, as a deterrent example to the others. Often they made the whole group kneel down for minor infractions.

Once, the block supervisor must have had a bad day. Over and over again, we were made to kneel down and no one knew why. As it happened, I felt a monstrous throbbing pain in my ear and brain, and with my palm I shielded my ear against the cold air, while with bowed head I knelt among the others. Someone near me made the comment that no doubt, because of the "stumdinste" – this is what they called the cleaning women – was why we had to kneel. The block supervisor happened to come by at that time and heard the comment. Unfortunately for me, she was right behind me, and like lightning, in her anger, she hit my aching ear so hard that I thought my head would fall off. This shock was so painful, that for days it felt like consecutive hammer blows to my brain. I could barely recover.

Due to the constant haranguing, dirt and illness, the prisoners were run down. Now Mengerle came more often for selection. He made the women undress, selected a few of them, and no one saw those people ever again.

One day, two extremely beautiful girls, suspected of having scarlet fever, went to the sick bay from the B lager. The woman doctors immediately diagnosed German measles, which has a rash similar to scarlet fever but disappears within three days. As it happened, Mengerle visited them on their second day of staying in sick bay. These two poor souls were selected along with other sick people, suspected of having scarlet fever, to be sent to the city hospital. At night they put them naked on the truck and took them to their tragic fate.

The following day, the occupants of ten barracks, about ten to twelve thousand women, were undressed, and while naked, were taken to a large square where they had to stand for hours in the windy cold weather waiting for Dr. Mengerle, who wanted to examine all the occupants of B lager to find out if there were any persons among them, suspected of having scarlet fever. Finally, after a long wait he arrived in his car with a woman soldier.

One by one, we had to walk by them with upraised arms without their actually looking at us. They were absorbed in their discussion. Perhaps, this was our luck, because who knows how many women he would have suspected of having scarlet fever.

Life continued in this way for weeks and months. One day the block supervisor was given the assignment to select kindergarten teachers and grade school teachers for the children. We were happy that the children were in good hands since they were providing for their education.

There was a run on the block supervisor. Everyone felt a calling for educating children. Everyone wanted to meet with their children, ready to take on anything so that they could be near their children. They chose many women. What happened to them, no one ever found out. It was all lies, they misled us. We found out close to the end of the war, that when they were looking for these educators, the poor little children were no longer alive.

Our nerves went completely to pieces. Meanwhile the number of deportees got fewer and fewer. Some were sent to work camps, some to fill the gas chambers. When Mengerle came, fear overcame everyone. Again he came for selection. The block supervisor was notified prior to his arrival.

When she saw from a distance Mengerle's car getting closer, she immediately gave the order to line up. This meant taking off our clothes and standing naked with clothes in hand. In our barrack, many of us came from the same town, sisterly, devoted to each other, who pledged that we would remain together as far as possible, under the circumstances.

Again they started the selection. Even from the sickroom friends came out in order to go together to the transport. My best friend was also in the sickroom because she was suffering from constant diarrhea and was very weak. We had already decided that if there would be a conscription, under all circumstances we would stay together. Now I yelled through the sickroom window: "Manci, they are conscripting, come on out." The poor thing jumped out through the window so that she would be present in time. In the meantime I had forgotten about the paper bandage on my head. All my friends were chosen for the transport and I was thrown back with the sick.

There, I quickly removed the bandage from my head and again ran to stand in for the conscription. A soldier saw me and chased me back with the remark: "Don't you dare come out of the room or there will be trouble." From the window of the barrack I watched as they conscripted my friends and they left with the others who had been picked. At that time I did not know that I would never see them again.

I felt lonely, sad and tired. All night, in my imagination, I heard their voices as if they were calling me, until with great difficulty I fell asleep in the cold, frightfully empty barrack.

Among others, my cousin, who was in bad shape, as you could count her ribs one by one, was also thrown back. However, her young daughter was chosen for the transport. The poor woman, with her naked body, ran after her daughter. When the soldier noticed this she hit her with her bullwhip a few times. And she, like a female lion, afraid for her young would not let go. She wanted to stay with her daughter and ran after her again. Perhaps she did not feel the repeated blows on her back, because so much pain filled her since they wanted to tear her away from her daughter. It looked like Mengerle had a good day, for when he saw the mother struggle, he allowed the daughter to stay behind. At that time the ones left behind were not aware of what they had escaped from.

From this transport of approximately one thousand to one thousand five hundred women, not a single soul came back. Day by day they were putting together new transports. They wanted to empty the lagers for new arrivals. These unfortunates were directed from Poland to Auschwitz. Still, occupants from four barracks from Lager B were awaiting their fates. We knew that soon our turn would come. Only we did not know where, when or how.

Selection of Workers

Doctor Mengerle, the frightening, smiling master of life and death, dictator of Auschwitz, once again approached the barracks with his escorts. Various feelings stormed in our souls. Nobody knew what would happen in the next half hour. Everyone would have liked to escape from this place. Now Mengerle came to select the people. You could never know if the ones chosen were going to be used for work transport or other experimental purposes. No one endeavored to do something against her fate. Everyone believed in her own fortune. The people became fatalistic. Nobody knew what step was right and what step was wrong. Mengerle had come to select from the occupants of two barracks.

Almost two thousand women had to undress completely, and as animals taken to the market, that's how he examined each separately, setting aside those suitable for his purpose. The rest were held back. One would never know their fate, they simply disappeared.

I became one of the chosen ones, and on the other side of the railroad structure, which separated the B Lager from the C Lager, we waited for further orders. We waited for hours. In the meantime, the men deportees, carrying very heavy loads, walked by us. Many happily recognized their husbands, acquaintances; who waived to indicate how hungry they were.

The small amount of bread, which was collected during the selection of the transport, was thrown to the starving men, taking care that the soldier who supervised us would not notice it. But she saw everything; even when we did not think that she was paying attention, the palm of her hand was already striking the face of the aid givers.

It was getting dark when the command came for the departure to the waiting transport. The march went along unknown roads, until in a roundabout way we arrived at a large brick building. Here they ordered us to stop. We just stood and waited. It was already dark. Dense clouds were towering in the sky. We were very cold. Our clothes were very deficient. Only thin ragged clothing covered our bodies. Suddenly it started raining. For a few minutes we stood helplessly, drenched, when we glanced at an open door in the brick building, where instinctively, without asking permission we rushed in. We found ourselves in a place where on both sides of the hall there were very small window openings. The walls all around were equipped with very thick pipes which gave out a lot of heat. The hall was not large, certainly not enough to hold one thousand five hundred people. We positioned ourselves on the floor as best we could. We were happy to squat down. We were used to this situation. For long weeks, as herrings on top of each other, next to each other, we had lain in the barracks on the bare floors, to rest at night. We were happy that for the first time after many long weeks we could be in a warm place.

The overseer did not say anything that we had occupied the hall without permission, but she contrived a diabolic plan.

As we recovered a little from our weariness and the warmth, and our clothes had also dried, we started to feel the heat in the room become unbearable. Finally it was such a heat that the sweat was freely flowing from our face and body, as though we were in a steam bath. Many, emaciated to the bones, took the rags off their bodies, and standing half naked we continued to suffer.

Through the window, we begged in vain for some water. The clothing that we had left on, was thoroughly soaked with our sweat. We could wring the water from it.

Late at night, the door suddenly opened, and a soldier appeared, shouting "Alles hinaus" (Everyone out). From the crouching, our extremities were numb... from the heat and sweat, our bodies were soaking wet. Like animals we were herded out into the cold, stormy night. The rain was still pouring, the wind was howling.

In the open, we huddled together and tried to protect each other from the cold, the wind, and the rain. Then we lay down on the soaking-wet ground, because due to our weariness and sleepiness, we could no longer hold ourselves up. And we fell asleep. When we awoke, soaked to the skin and shivering from the cold, it was getting light. Only God knows why we all did not get sick. Later the rain stopped, the wind stopped blowing. We recovered a little.

A short time later, they lined us up again. Mengerle came with his henchmen. Renewed nakedness, renewed sifting. Those who looked the weakest were held back from the group. Those that were picked, were lined up for bathing. In groups of fifty we were sent to the showers, after every little rag, that could even perhaps be used as a handkerchief, had been taken away from us.

After the cleaning, everyone got a light grey linen dress, those who did not have shoes got wooden shoes. It was almost a pleasure to see these uniform-like garments on the women. Even though they were a little light, considering the cold weather; they made us look more normal, no longer covered in rags.

Breakfast. Grits in milk and water. This was completely unaccustomed food for Auschwitz. Everyone greedily devoured her small portion. Long weeks had passed since we had had edible food. Scarcely had we finished eating, we lined up and departed toward the freight depot.

Once again locked up in freight cars, crowded together, we went toward a new station. We left Auschwitz. We felt relieved leaving this terrible place; and with new hope we thought that we were through with the worst of it. It felt that whatever would happen to us, we could not be put through such suffering and deprivation again.

We had little claim on life. We only wished that just for once we could fill our stomachs, and have a haystack in which we could finally have enough sleep to rest our tired and weakened bodies. The locomotive was taking the locked up wagons through towns and villages toward an unknown destination. The days in the wagons were somehow bearable. But the nights...those nights full of visions. Locked up in the dark wagons, cramped tightly together, our sleepy, tired and bruised bodies lay one on top of the other. We pushed, pulled and swore at each other, trying to obtain a little space. No, this cannot even be imagined: the torment, the suffering....It was dark. The train arrived at a large station. Suddenly, the engine stopped. Inside the dark wagon, a panic-like commotion took place.

Everyone jumped up, criss-crossing, stepping on each other. Crying, wailing with fear.... Through the tiny barred windows, in the dark ghostly night, like beautiful but fearsome fireworks, the incendiary bombs could be observed as they left behind their blazing trail. They came down with a bang, and after that a column of fire, as high as a multistoried building lit up the area.

Fascinated, I stood in a corner of the wagon and observed this frighteningly beautiful spectacle, which lasted about one hour, until the all-clear signal sounded. It was quiet and dark again. The freight train moved again, through fields and along rivers. In the closed wagons, we could not see any of it. We could not look out through the tiny, barred open windows, in order not to shut out the air from the others.

This is how the train arrived, in the late evening, to a darkened station, where they finally opened the wagon doors. We got off and lined up. Once again they started us on our way. In the moonlight, we noticed a small sign with the inscription: "Ravensbrück".

The procession started on a beautifully tended road filled with small pebbles. On the side of the road, rows of leafy trees; which must have shaded the road during the day. This whole journey seemed improbable. It was like walking through a make-believe scene. Multistoried villas, in the middle of well-tended gardens, lined the road all the way. But nowhere did a single small light, filter through the windows. We could not see a single soul. Everything was so lifeless. Only the prisoners' soundless march, in their light dresses, seemed like a giant moving snake pressing forward on the road. At a turn of the road, the water of a large lake, bordered by leafy trees and shrubs, reflected the moonlight.

At the time we did not know what secrets the lake concealed. How many prisoners', deportees' sufferings it had witnessed. Now the lake's water lay silent, around it peace and calm. The little ripples could not speak. The rustle of the leaves, nobody could understand. And the marchers, unaware, kept going. It was getting light. We met soldiers who did not fit into this peaceful mood in any way.

The journey did not last much longer. Coming out of one of the turns of the road, we observed in the distance, a high brick enclosure. As we approached, a very large iron gate came into view; which all at once opened up as the marchers got to its vicinity. We marched through the gate, escorted by the armed guards.

The whole thing seemed like a dream; but from this dream there was no awakening. Inside of the brick wall, among the row of barracks, we marched. The barracks were uniformly aligned on the clean level roads.

Much later, a prisoner eyewitness who had suffered in various camps stated: "If these barracks and these well-groomed roads could talk, they would tell how much pain, how much suffering and how much death accompanied their creation. A few years ago, this place was nothing more than a large, empty open field. The first deportees were French women. They carried the huge rocks for the barrack foundations and piles for the building of the barracks. They also built the barracks under the direction of the SS soldiers with hard labor. Due to their deprivation and labor, their clothes covered only skin and bones. Nevertheless they carried their heavy loads from morning to late evening, under the watchful eyes of the women soldiers who let bloodhounds loose on the poor prisoners if they could not keep up with the dictated workload. This is how they perished, every one of them; then came another unfortunate transport, for whom a similar fate was waiting."

Our group arrived to a wide road, one side of the road was bordered by a grassy knoll. The other side was lined by a row of barracks. The road between the barracks was dusted with powdered coal. On this road, inside the barracks, were located the laundry, dryers and sick bay full of sick people.

We arrived tired, hungry, and weak. We just stood, and stood and waited for them to lead us somewhere where we could compose ourselves and rest a little. But we did not get any direction. We noticed that the grassy knoll, which until now had been empty, all at once filled up with women. They were in reasonable shape. Each of them held a small package in her hand. They were Polish women, and as we found out later, they were prostitutes. They had arrived here directly from Poland. These people were allowed to keep their necessary belongings. They were in their own clothes, even their hair was not cut. As soon as they had occupied the empty grassy knoll, they received their portion of lunch

We, the newly arrived, could only look at them with wide-eyed longing as they ate their cabbage soup. Such a thing had not been eaten by us in weeks and months. How good it would feel, if we could only taste it. Those people assured us that on the following noon, everyone would eat her fill.

We imagined our broken, enameled tin plates, filled with steaming hot soup. We could imagine its taste and smell. We imagined ourselves spooning the soup with a real spoon. Until now, we had received the terrible smelling thing which they called food in Auschwitz, in a battered pot or container, from which five of us had to sip, one after the other, because a spoon was an unknown notion. In time necessity taught us how to carve from wood and tin pieces, a little shovel-shaped object which we could use to lift the food to our mouths.

It was getting dark. We still were standing or leaning against each other without direction. We saw the Polish women lie down on the grassy knoll. Seeing this we sat down on the powdered coal road. It was a cold night. We were shivering in our short sleeved linen dresses. We lay down on the ground, close to each other so as to warm each other. From the weariness, hunger and exhaustion, we fell asleep. We did not even notice the absence of standing for "apel" which we had gotten used to in the prior months. As morning approached, we slowly woke up. As mushrooms from the ground, that's how we raised our heads one after the other from our resting place. We looked around to find out where we actually were. We looked at each other questioningly, with a strange expression. What had happened to us? We were totally unrecognizable. Like negroes, only the whites of our teeth and eyes were visible from our blackened faces. Our light dresses were like chimney sweep uniforms. It was so comical that we started laughing. For the first time in months, for one brief moment, we were able to forget the situation we were in. Everyone laughed at each other. Lying on the powdered coal road, we had become totally blackened, our faces, hands, legs and clothes.

The trouble only started after this. We could not wash up, could not wash our hands. There was no water. To be more specific, our group did not have water. However the Polish women had it. Only for a piece of bread, which was a big thing here, were they willing to give us a little water to wash our hands.

In the meantime it was noon. We stood in line for lunch. We were trembling, will they distribute to us as well? Just now, they bring the kettle. Just now they are giving it out to everybody. How little is needed to make people happy. Because we were momentarily happy that after so many weeks, we were finally able to get edible food. This is how it happened for three days.

By the morning of the fourth day, we found it natural to be covered with soot and dirt. You can get used to anything. On the evening of the fourth day, a woman soldier came to line us up to take us to the baths. On the way, we met up with French and Dutch block occupants who looked at our pathetic, dirty group with sympathetic compassion that made us feel good.

As they passed us, they consoled us with kind words that we should not be scared since this could not go on much longer.

We had to stay in line until late evening, when our turn came for bathing. At last we got in the large room equipped with showerheads, where everyone was able to scrub the filth off themselves. After the shower we got clean striped clothing, and set out on foot through the camp to our designated barrack. The barrack was designed for 400 people, but more than one thousand were placed in them. The beds were 80 cm. wide, three on top of each other. The fact that after many long months, we were finally able to lie down in a bed... that feeling can not be described. Totally exhausted, we lay down, and immediately fell asleep. We did not even notice how we were sleeping in the beds, like herrings in a can, two at the head and one at the foot. But it was a bed, and we got to eat here, where we stayed for two weeks.

We did not know anything about the horrors of Ravensbruck. We only spent two transitional weeks here. We were in quarantine so that we could recover our health and be useful in the labor camp.

Before we left Ravensbruck, everyone got a number. From then on we were no longer a person but only a number. They divided us into three groups and again we went through a medical examination. In the hospital's stone corridor, we waited naked for hours, until it occurred to the head doctor that a group, intended for transport was waiting. We lined up in single file in the enormous square yard. Everyone looked at herself. We were dreadfully thin; we were afraid: "Would they find us strong enough for work?" Because everyone knew that here you would have to work, otherwise you would be annihilated. They could not use the sick or the weak. The women stood shivering, not only from the cold but from fear as well. The examination began. The crowd that was undressed hours earlier, one by one appeared naked in front of the doctor. Without even looking at the bodies, he asked us to open our mouths, looked in and found all of us acceptable without exception. If it had not been so sad, we would have laughed at the circus that they had put us wretched people through.

We got dressed. In the corridor of the hospital, we met another group. They had just arrived from France that day. They had been rounded up in the street as they were taking a walk or going to work. They were very kind French people. They had all seen better days, these women and girls. Some of them, as they passed by, gave us the latest news. "It cannot go on for long," they said. "The American army is already on French soil." Their consolation felt good. The first news which we had heard and gladly believed.

They led us back to the barracks. There we waited till evening. It was dark, when in lines of five we started for the station. Such a relief came over everyone, as the large iron gate opened up to let us out. Again, another stop behind us. Who knows where our fate will take us?....

Toward a New Workplace

Again we were loaded onto freight cars. Everybody found a place, crouching on the dirty floor of the wagon. Somehow the situation felt easier; as though the prevailing mood had changed. As though the terrible pressure that had kept us in captivity had dissolved. What could have conjured it up? Perhaps it was the beautiful late fall day, which was as mild as a caressing touch? Or maybe the still warm, brilliant sun rays, which penetrated through the wagon's small window, and through the narrow gap on the wagon door, and there played happily, free from care, on a crouching prisoner's still bald head? Or maybe the presence of the young, pleasant looking blond soldier, who was assigned as our supervisor in the wagon?

The young German woman sat among us, lost in thought, with a smile hovering on her young face. It was evident that her thoughts were wandering to a more pleasant place. From her behavior, it appeared that she was far from the German thinking and ideas and hatefulness.

In the beginning she looked around in a serious manner, as though she wanted to maintain authority for herself. But her soft, pleasant voice seemed informal when she spoke. We were just astounded and did not know what to do with our amazement. We were no longer used to this kind of voice, this kind of behavior toward us: that someone, a German, would treat us as human beings, could feel with us, was concerned about our fate.

This treatment had such an effect on us that we, who had suffered so much in the past few months, now did not find the forced travel unbearable in the freight car. Even though the situation, due to the tight quarters, was no different than our previous experiences.

The train started. The female soldier informally related to us, that she had been born close to the French border, that the final destination of her journey was to our next station and that it was her home. Waiting for her was her mother and her fiancé. She was extremely happy that she had been chosen as our supervisor, because in this way she could be on vacation for a few weeks, perhaps even get married.

All day long, she talked; she was in a good mood and happy to be alive. She also sang a song starting with "alles vorüber, alles wird vorüber" to comfort herself, and to console us prisoners, who spontaneously hummed the song with her. In the meantime the little German woman distributed bread and margarine to us. For months we had not eaten with such relish. Time passed, and we did not even realize that the sun was setting. It was getting dark, the weather was getting cool. They closed the freight-car door. The soldier slept with us. She did not wish for more comfort and space than that which was forced upon us. The night passed more peacefully than at other times, and it was morning.

The sun was shining with the same brilliance, and the woman was just as pleasant as the day before, only she seemed a little bit more tired. This means of travel could not have given her much pleasure either.

We arrived at a station and the train suddenly stopped. Written orders were waiting for the wagon supervisors. The young woman also took the orders, which she received with dejection. She did not talk to us for a long time. The train had long since left the station, she was still sitting down. All at once she started whimpering and started wiping the tears from her eyes. She looked like a child with hurt feelings. For a while I watched her, then I asked her what had happened. She tearfully related that the destination had been changed, she could not go home, even though her mother and her fiancé were waiting for her. Despite the uniform, she did not feel professional; even now, she was human, a woman who had a heart and a personal life.

And the engine pulled the train along, clattering loudly and rushing toward its destination. The people in the wagon were sitting tightly together, propping each other up as they collided, when the wagon buffers kept bumping into one another. Totally exhausted from the constant repeated movements, which we had not even noticed the day before, we watched this poor young woman silently; forgetting about our own troubles for the moment. All of us felt sorry for her, because her humanity was able to bring warmth to our tormented spirits. For a few hours, she was able to make us forget that we were no longer looked upon as humans but only as numbers that have no personalities, or personal life or will; that we were in servitude to our jailers who had absolute power over us, according to their pleasure and mood.

The engine was taking us through villages and towns; and through the narrow opening of the wagon door, we looked outside without a word. The engine pulled its heavy load, through bombed-out cities where the walls of houses, without windows or roofs, sadly rose toward the sky; where burnt-out factories, collapsed smokestacks, giant bomb craters marked the effects of the air-raids.

The train rumbled through a big industrial town. Everything reduced to ruin. Few people could be seen. We did not observe even one building intact. The attackers had thoroughly devastated this place. A short time later, the train started to slow down, then stopped. Nothing, anywhere. Open tracks. No trace of people or houses. They made us get off the freight cars. The supervisors looked around, but they too were at a loss. A soldier came to notify the supervisors as to where we had arrived. Again lining up, our march started under the soldier's direction. Emerging from a turn in the road, we read a directional sign: Taucha. This, we found out, was a suburb of Leipzig.

We did not have to go far from the bombed out part of the city, before they led us to a similarly bombed out area. We looked upon a ruined row of barracks. The still smoking bomb craters, like giant gaping wounds alternated with the bombed and half-burned out barracks.

Here they led us, where a few days earlier, happy Hitler Youth merrily chased each other. This was their home, where they had received their military training. Here they inoculated them with hate for their helpless fellow human beings. Here they taught them to look down upon and disparage everyone who did not belong to their superior "Herrenvolk".

A few days earlier, this had been the scene of heavy aerial bombardment, and thus it became our responsibility, to rebuild the ruined barracks and to level out the surrounding area.

Under the orders of the S.S. soldiers, and under the supervision of old soldiers, we started the work. A short time later, there was so much commotion that it looked like an anthill. Some brought planks to be used for those barracks that had less damage. Some were nailing and hammering as though they had done this all their lives. Some, including myself, shoveled the earth and carried it to deep bomb craters. The supervising old soldiers were unusually lenient. If they saw that we were working, even though slowly and while talking, they did not hurry us or reprimand us. Because of this we completed our assigned work in a better mood.

The sun was already high in the sky, when we noticed that they were bringing porcelain plates. Due to this unaccustomed phenomenon, we dashed towards them and stared, as though we had never seen anything like this before. From such a sight, we had by now become truly unaccustomed. After the battered, worn out pots and pans, it seemed a miracle. We picked up a plate off the floor, we stroked it and looked at it; then quickly we wanted to wash them because they were dusty and muddy. It was a miraculous feeling, especially during the distribution of the lunch, when without any discussion between us, we moved one by one in front of the kettle, each with our own plate, which the supervisors filled with cooked red cabbage and potatoes boiled in their jackets.

It can not be imagined how happily we started to eat. There were those who swallowed their meal as though they were afraid someone would take it from them. There were others who relished each individual bite, so slowly did they eat and with such calm.

After a small rest, we started working again. We carried buckets filled with water and brooms to clean the barracks. Some carried heavy bedboards that needed to be assembled so that three beds could be placed, one on top of the other. Others brought hay sacks and covers. We could not understand from where they had raised all these supplies. Finally the many hands completed their many chores. The orderly and well-equipped barracks welcomed their tired occupants.

Meals were distributed in the evening again. It felt good to eat after the work. With a good appetite we consumed the bread, the salad, and were happy that they treated us more humanely and supplied provisions to us. As soon as we finished our supper, a windstorm sprang up. In the sky, black clouds piled up, thunder and lightning were followed by pouring rain, as though all the faucets in the sky had opened up at once. Everyone ran into the barracks to escape from the rain. We rushed to occupy our beds.

Two of us occupied one narrow bed. Tired from work, we were happy that we were under a roof, and could stretch out under the (until now greatly lacking) thin coverings. However we did not sleep much. Especially those of us who slept on the top bunk. The howling wind struck the rain against the walls of the barrack; against the roof, which to be sure, had not been fixed with great expertise. The water found its way through the cracks, first drop by drop, then at a faster pace. It thoroughly soaked the covers. Crouching, we sat in one corner of the bed which was still dry, and held our plates to catch the dripping water. When they filled up, which happened quite frequently, we got off our third level bed so we could empty the plate through a slit of the broken window. This unusual and tiring night-amusement in pitch dark, lasted for hours, when we noticed that the weather was calming down, the water drops struck the plates more wearily and less and less often, and we lay down on the wet bed, and exhausted, we fell asleep.

The next day, we had to rise early, without having had much rest; so that after counting the prisoners, and distributing black coffee, everyone could start their assigned work. At this time, everyone was engaged in leveling the ground. There was a lot of work. Very deep pits had to be filled with soil. Where the earth stood higher, one had to take the soil and put it into the craters. During the digging we came across some very valuable items for ourselves: Knives without handles, forks with missing or bent prongs, rusty spoons. One cannot imagine how happy we were with such findings. We did not look at what kind, where and to whom they had belonged; what was in our mind was only that if we had something to eat, then we would have something to eat with; even if it was rusty or broken, that would not be a problem. We did not require much. Fearfully, everyone hid their found treasures, and when the supervisors turned around, we took out our forks, spoons and rubbed them with soil, so that they would be clean and rust-free.

A few days later, one could hardly recognize this bombed out area. We fixed it up so well, with our combined force, as though we had done this all our lives. We worked a lot, but it seemed we were more rested. The regular work, the normal rest, eating, was good for us after the very torturous Auschwitz life.

We stayed five days in Taucha, then they started us again on a new journey.

ALTENBURG The Labor Camp

Under the supervision of an old Reichswehr soldier, we were again loaded into freight-cars; he believed in common sense and did not adopt Hitler's ideas. One could see that he felt sorry for us. He brought hay into our wagon so that we would not have to sit on the dirty, hard floor, and almost apologetically said that he hoped that we would not get tired in the tight space, because it would take only a few hours to complete our journey.

We began to believe and hope that our situation would only get better. However, unfortunately the past few days were only a taste of how it could be.

It was early afternoon, while passing a large railroad station, that the engine started to slow down. The train was taken to a side track where it stopped. Everyone was ordered off the wagon, then, in the usual five to a row formation, they started our departure.

It was a beautiful fall day. The leaves on the trees were turning yellow. The sun weakly shed its rays. The road we passed through was lined with trees, clean, smooth and well-cared for; nowhere a fallen leaf on the road. We were almost afraid to step on the ground, lest our wooden shoes leave an imprint. The commandant came towards us; he took over the march. He looked us over thoroughly. It seemed that few prisoners from Auschwitz had previously been under his care. Noticing our bald heads, he remarked: "Are you all full of fleas?" He thought that that was why they had cut off our hair. But in Auschwitz, not even the insects could survive.

The march went on. Everywhere absolute order, stillness and cleanliness, but nowhere the trace of a single soul. We went by a large fruit orchard. The winter apples and pears were hanging heavy on the branches, showing up in yellow and red, as if offering themselves with a smile. During our deprivation and hunger, we had often thought about the good tasting fruits in our home, and now, almost under hypnosis, we stared at the apples and pears, while suffering the torment of Tantalus, and could not take our eyes off the branches, which were bent under the weight of the fruit.

A loud "los, los, weiter" (keep moving) brought us back to reality and we kept going. Through a large iron gate, they led us to a square, in the center of which was a large pool. Three sides of the area were bordered by a high wire fence, the fourth side was closed in with barracks. To the left, beyond the fence was one of the halls of the factory, from where, from time to time, working women prisoners came out to stare at the newcomers.

On the other side of the fence was a railroad embankment and we could see the trains running back and forth. On the right side, barracks housed the guard rooms of the S.S. soldiers and supervisors. The side of the large gate opened on a wide highway.

After we arrived, the large iron gate closed behind us. Since nobody directed us, we just stood and waited, to find out what would happen to us. It was a long time before they brought out a large table, they also brought sheets of paper and pens so that the supervisors could enter our names and numbers. It took many hours to enter the few hundred prisoners' names. It was almost evening. We were awfully tired. The new impressions, the waiting, and not eating all day, took us totally off our feet. Finally they led us to a huge barrack, in which the beds were placed three on top of each other. Now that we finally got this far, everyone tried to find a place to lie down. We found two empty beds next to each other and my friend and I immediately secured them for ourselves. My sister-in-law and another friend of mine found a place a little further from us. Due to our weariness and exhaustion, we fell asleep immediately.

In the early morning hours of the next morning: reveille! They distributed our morning black coffee. We then marched out to the empty space in front of the barrack, where they put us in lines of five. We were standing for some time before a supervisor came from the factory to select the ones suitable for work. We were lucky because our line of five, including my sister-in-law and two friends were found suitable. Those who were not selected were used for work around the barracks and kitchen.

While we were waiting in the area, we watched as they put together and started a march for transport, a group that we had replaced. They were gypsy women who seemed happy that they were being taken to another work place. They thought that they would be taken to a better place than this. The commandant, they said, often used a dog whip, with or without reason, and did not care to whom or where the beating was administered.

Six o'clock next morning, we marched out to the factory, and everybody was assigned a workplace. From then, the regular work started. We worked 12 hours a day, sometimes during the daytime, sometimes during the night. One cannot imagine how exhausting it was to work nonstop in our weakened condition. The Germans knew how to exploit their manpower. They took complete advantage of their own people, why then would they not exploit their prisoners. Only a few German men were in the factory. Those who were employed were not fit for combat. Most of them were older foremen. The overseers were German women. In them, there frequently awakened a good will towards the deportees, and seeing the starved and worn out prisoners, in great secret they slid to us now and then a little pear or tomato which certainly gave us pleasure in this great misery.

There were also free prisoners on the factory grounds. These men and women had been driven from the occupied territories to Germany, because they were considered untrustworthy due to their religious views. They were not locked in barracks under armed guard but stayed in the factory area in separate barracks. They were allowed to leave, feed themselves; they received food rations and even a small pay. They had identification cards and were allowed to move freely on the factory grounds.

These "free" prisoners could feel the deportees' misery and many times made their lot easier by secretly giving food to selected deportees and by talking to us as humans.

The management of the factory acknowledged the value of the prisoners' work, and as much as they could, as much as the Germans were capable of doing, they too acknowledged that we were human beings, because they needed a work force. The deportees worked. They worked because they knew that if the factory management was not satisfied with their work, they would be put out of the factory, which was equivalent to a death sentence.

Because of this, and only because of this, we worked normally and in apparent good spirits. In the factory we felt more or less like human beings, if this situation and condition could be called human.

In the factory, talking was forbidden during work. We worked silently, deep in thought, totally forgetting the sorry state we were in. Frequently I recalled in my imagination the past, happy times in my family circle, talking with each other, playing and telling stories to the children; and I felt myself smiling. The memory was so intense that I sometimes did not even realize where I was. The time passed slowly this way, but it passed.

In our place of work, we sat while we worked. We selected shell casings, polished them, giving them a glossy finish. Not a single scratch was allowed on the finished casing; otherwise they needed to be melted down again. I was in the same hall as my friends and sister-in-law. As much as possible, we tried to complete the work requirement. Our work was not very hard, physically, but was very monotonous. Seated in one place for twelve hours, making the same movements, selecting the casings, then putting them into wooden boxes. As each case was filled, it was put on a small cart, which was then taken to another hall to be filled with explosives.

In the beginning, we bore ourselves well, especially during the day; but the night work was very hard to take. Next to me sat my friend, the poor soul was in bad shape, and was unable to work at night. During work, her hand practically stopped in midair, her head nodded and she fell fast asleep. Whenever the master came, I would give her a slight touch to wake her up, and automatically she would continue her work with eyes half closed. When the master, or supervisor left again, she did not know what was happening around her. One of the supervisors, who was a worthy follower of the German ideal, could not stand that my friend was only human and could not manage the night work, maneuvered until they threw my friend out of the factory. We were greatly concerned. There was a lot of talk that a transport was being put together from the non-working and totally weakened ones. By a lucky chance, they were looking for daytime workers in one of the halls and my little friend was found to be acceptable. We breathed easier.

While in the beginning, life in the camp was tolerable; as time went by, the situation grew worse. We had to work but the diet was very inferior, and lacked all nourishment. Even sitting caused suffering during work. Because I was growing very thin, and continually sitting during work, I was covered with sores. In secret I put my thin blanket under my dress before going to work, so that during work I would not feel the hardness of the chair. Many had done the same thing. Everyone helped themselves as they could. It's true that on the mornings or evenings, when the workers had to line up, ready to go to work, we felt tortured, that the commander, who examined us would notice the blankets, which despite our thinness, slightly filled out our dress. This was against regulations and at those times, he soundly beat his victims with his whip.

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.... They were stronger and more aggressive and had given more rights to themselves. Surely, so often had they heard the commandant scolding the deportees with the most filthy words, and they strove to use this to their advantage. In the bathing rooms, they felt and behaved as masters, no wonder: they were Germans and as such, superior. To get away from this type of situation, during the night, when everybody was still sleeping, my friend and I climbed down from our second tier beds, and went down to the bathing room, the door of which was sometimes left open by mistake. Slowly we would sneak in and thoroughly wash ourselves. At those times, happy that we had overcome these problems, we went up to our beds and slept until reveille.

In the morning, we had to rush to dress and to drink our black coffee, because the commandant did not know the meaning of leniency or consideration. He used the dog whip with pleasure. It was enough for him, that someone was a minute late in getting into the line, or stepping out of the line, to use his favored expediency.

When he had counted his group and found everything in order, shouting "lo-os, lo-os" (let's go, let's go), he started the march; marching in a long line, out through the lager gate and through the factory halls' labyrinths. In the meantime, as though the long line changed by subdividing in sections, each group became detached to disappear through the open gates of their workplace.

We worked for twelve hours at a time; it was a lot and very tiring. Somehow, however, we were more willing to be in the factory doing our repetitious work, even though weak and hungry, than in the barrack where we were exposed to the commander and supervisor's capriciousness and roughness.

At six o'clock in the evening, after the heavy work, after the lining up and counting off the group, we started toward the barracks under the escort of armed guards. Here is where we really felt that we were prisoners.

We were hungry and tired, we just fell in through the barrack door.. This is where they distributed the weak supper. Everybody wanted to be the first at the distribution of the food. Pushing and elbowing each other, once again only the bully was successful. The supervisor was young and unable to maintain order and discipline. Later they exchanged her for a middle-aged woman whose nasty disposition made the workers afraid of her, and after that they showed more discipline. The distribution of food belonged among the supervisor's responsibilities. She thoroughly abused her power. She was happy when she could say a rude word, when she could pinch off a piece of the tiny portion of bread and margarine. She was a vicious woman.

As soon as we swallowed our meager dinner, we lay down in our beds, so we could wake up the next morning at five o'clock and be ready for work by six o'clock. During this time, we worked the day shift. Those who worked at night were supposed to rest during the day. It often happened that during the morning sleep, the supervisor would wake many of them, at the order of the commandant, and would order them to work around the barrack. At such times the workers went to the factory bone-tired and explained to the foreman why they were incapable of working. The management of the factory became aware of the situation and made arrangements that in the barracks, they would not burden the prisoners with work, because it was detrimental to production.

We were well into winter. Everybody got a pair of stockings and a better or worse coat. Underwear was given very sparingly to us. Every week, we got a change. At these times, the supervisor would distribute them and allotted the fresh underwear to her circle of friends. The underwear consisted of a grey flannel shirt and underpants. To the others, accompanied by rude words she threw a sometimes better, sometimes worse piece of clothing. Later we found it better not to ask her; instead, at night, after we came back to the barracks from the factory, dead tired, after we ate our inferior dinner, we went down to the washroom, took off our underwear so we could wash them. After that we would hang them to dry on a stretched out string, over our beds, so that in the morning, sometimes dry, sometimes half wet, we could put them on. At such times, we hid ourselves without clothing under the blanket.

Later, not only the hunger and the cold, but also the lice started to torture us. This became a new occupation. In the beginning, embarrassed, we took off our shirts and pants each night and looked to see if they had any occupants. However we always found some and we could not get rid of them. Finally we got so used to them that we found the louse-hunting quite normal. There were those who presented their unusually large specimens in a triumphant procession to their neighbors.

One day the commandant ordered a general disinfecting. It became the night workers task to take the day workers haysacks and blankets to a disinfecting place. That night, as we arrived in the barracks exhausted from work, we were given an order by the supervisor, that even before dinner would be distributed, all the workers would go down to the disinfecting place in groups.

The disinfecting room was at the beginning of a very long and winding corridor. This corridor connected all the barracks where the sleeping quarters of the Polish women, the gypsies, and the Dutch, French and Hungarian deportees were located. Everybody had to undress, and naked, had to take their shoes and clothing to the disinfecting room, in which there was such a caustic, tear-producing smell, that we could hardly keep our eyes open. Everybody noted where they placed their clothes, and then ran out of the room, barefoot, naked, along the stone-floored corridor, in the winter cold. We almost froze.

Finally, at the other end of the long corridor, we were directed to the showers. Here, those who could, sat down, and we waited, waited, hours long we waited, shivering, until at last they allowed us to stand under the luke-warm shower in groups. When we were done with this, again we waited, soaking wet, because no towels were available. Except for those who had bought one from the gypsies for their daily allotment of bread, and by chance nobody had stolen it from them. This is how I had obtained my little towel, for the bread I had saved by bitterly fasting; However, my towel soon disappeared during a barrack raid.

And we waited, hungry, cold and tired, until suddenly the door opened and two men came in with a long hose which was dipped into a pail. This vessel contained some kind of disinfectant solution, with which they sprayed all of us, and then they let us out of the room.

Again, we ran shivering through the long, cold corridor, where the clothes were thrown helter-skelter, because due to the caustic choking air, we could not stay in the room with our eyes open. Nobody could find their own belongings under these conditions; because, with eyes half closed and in such a hurry, no one could locate their own things. Everyone snapped up what they could and ran out of the place. Out in the corridor, we put on whatever clothes we had found; and after that, totally exhausted, we dragged ourselves to the barracks, to our resting place. We found our haysacks; but no trace was found of our blankets. Those who came out of the disinfecting room first, had helped themselves, sometimes even to two blankets. Thus, many did not get any. So they had to go through the barracks and look at every bed, until they found their own blankets, for which they had to fight to get back. Finally, after much difficulty, order and quiet were reestablished. Everybody got their portion of supper, and quickly we slipped back into our beds; which had been disinfected, but still the bugs remained and multiplied.

The weather was in our favor. Despite the snow-covered, frozen solid roads on which we marched day after day, to the factory and back, we enjoyed the dust-free pure air. We did not see the sun much, because it was still dark when we went to and returned from work.

Only when the airplanes, which often came to visit the factory area during the day, set off the sirens, whose howling roared through the factory area, then we would have to leave the factory, march back to the barrack, where the underground space was used as an air raid shelter. At these times we enjoyed the weather. Luckily, we had very nice, dry weather. It was seldom raining. The roads were white from the freshly, fallen snow. The sun shone brightly; it was not warm but the rays reflected the snow that covered everything. Many times, the planes were already flying over our heads, but somehow we were not afraid of them; and so that we could enjoy the beautiful weather longer, in spite of the armed guards repeatedly rushing us, we made an effort to march slowly to the barrack gate, where the commandant was already waiting for us, and yelling los-los(get going, get going), and with the help of his dog whip hastened our descent to the underground shelter. At these times, the night workers were already down there.

If during the air-raids we stayed in the barracks, there was always great confusion. As it happened, the barracks could accommodate a thousand souls. Three beds were placed on top of each other. In one half of the barrack, close to the exit, the German gypsy girls were located. They were differentiated from the deportees; better beds, better blankets, more food. They could receive packages, and even money from their relatives. Among them were some beautiful gypsy girls, also unbelievably clean, nice and kind-hearted. But there were others among them, especially the older ones, who could not deny their gypsy characters. Especially one among them, who, most likely because of her wickedness, had been made overseer of the water faucet. She looked like a real witch. Her hair was never combed and always messy. She was always gesticulating with a worn broom in her hand; while, with her shouting, she terrorized those deportees who dared to come for a little water.

At night, with the commandant's silent approval, the younger gypsy women danced and sang in the underground corridor; and with various movements of their hands, and beating the rhythm on the wall, they produced jazz music. They were enormously talented and at these times cheerful. But when the air-raid siren sounded, out of them came the undisciplined, ancient instinct of their gypsy blood. Forgetting themselves, their shouting and yelling was so loud that one could not hear the alarm for their voices. Everyone tried to go down the steep steps to a more protected place. At these times, a panic-like fear broke out among the gypsies. With elbows and legs they forced their way ahead, not caring that the wooden-shod deportees could not keep up with the running tempo; they pushed them, stepped on them, went through them; scolding, cursing, wanting to know why they stood in the way. After such air-raids, especially towards the end of the war, when the planes often came one after the other to visit the factory area; when not only the bodies, but the nerves, had totally given up their function; we had to gather the victims, who with cracked heads, broken arms or legs, or badly bruised, had to be taken to the sick-hall.

The deportees' situation was getting worse, day by day. The shortage of nourishment, the vitamin deficiency, attacked the insides of the mouths and teeth. Three quarters of the prisoners got scurvy. The doctor's office was always filled with people. When at night we arrived to the block, dead tired from a whole day's work, and after that went for treatment, which consisted of smearing the open sores in our mouths with a diluted solution of iodine, we had to wait for hours for our turn. Later the woman doctor gave the treatment in the barrack.

The lager doctor was a deportee from Belgium. She was an unpleasant, capricious woman, whose voice screeched like a parrot. Because of that, everybody called her "Lori" (Polly?). When she came into the barracks to treat the ailing, her voice carried so cuttingly, that everyone covered their ears. Nobody liked the poor thing, because she was brusque and very nervous. I, myself, am very grateful to her despite that many times she embittered our lives with her impossible behavior and impatience. On two occasions I can thank her for keeping me alive. One time, I had tremendous pain due to scurvy. The inside of my mouth became totally raw. For days I could not eat anything, or swallow. If my friend had not brought me some mashed potato which she fished out of her own soup, when accidentally she found some, and then mixed it with her own margarine, and brought it to me in the factory where we worked in the same hall; I would have been totally without nourishment. With the smallest pressure, my gums did not bleed but actually squirted blood. It often happened that during the middle of a monstrous pain, my gums started swelling suddenly. At these times, my brain felt as though it had moved from its place. Everything felt as if it had moved.

At night, in the factory, I was unable to work. The overseer allowed me to sit without moving. I held my head while I curled up in my seat. Suddenly I felt the swollen gum burst open and a large blood clot spurted out of it. After that the pain subsided too. This repeated itself often. My gums now felt totally lifeless. It was possible to scratch them from the teeth. I was very frightened. I was afraid that if this lasted much longer, I would lose my teeth as many others already had, who suffered from the same problem.

I went to "Lori" in the sickroom to ask her for *prontosilt*. Until now, every time I had asked for it she had refused. By chance the sick room was empty, and I found her in a good mood. We started talking, and with much optimism she told me that after the war she would go to New York. I told her without much conviction, that I also wanted to go there. Surely, I was in such a bad condition that I did not think that I would ever get there. She asked if I had someone in America. I said "My older brother". "Who is your brother?" "He was the head physician at the Cottage Sanatorium in Vienna," I said. "What's his name?" I told her my brother's name, and at the mention of his name (Dr. Alexander Kelen), she reacted as though she had lost her mind, and she jumped up: "Gott, der schone Mensch, und was fur eine Arzt er war!" (God, that beautiful man, and what a doctor he was!) and she clapped her hands and ran back and forth in the room, talking to herself. I just looked... I did not know what had happened to her.

"Do you know my brother?" I asked. "Certainly, I worked under him for two years," she said. "Do you know his address?" "Of course, I know it." "I will ask you for it." "Allright" I replied. With that, she ran to the nurse and told her that she should give me a few prontosils and aspirins, at once. The nurse just looked at her; apparently, she was not used to the doctor's generosity. Reacting to this, the doctor said to her: "She must get it. I know her brother. He is also a doctor." This is how I came by this medication, by chance, which I would never have received without my brother's acquaintance. And this stopped my advanced scurvy and I did not suffer too much after that. The next day, she again gave me an aspirin, which was also a big thing.

The second time was long after the new year. I was very weak, I had lost 66 lbs. I went to see Lori, because due to the air that was always acrid in the factory, I got a rash on my face, which would not disappear. It was very itchy, and I suffered a lot during work. I always had to touch my face, in order to ease the itching. I asked for some medication for it. She was not able to give me any, but she gave me a "Bettkartet". By chance, they were putting another transport together. It was now the middle of February and very cold. They released those workers from the factory, who no longer had the ability to work well; this included my poor sister-in-law. They no longer could use her in the factory, and she was gathered with the others for the transport. Also among them was a young friend of mine, all together there were about 130 of them. Since they did not have enough numbers for the transport, those with "Bettkartet" were added to the transport by the commandant. I was among them. The commandant lined up those that had been selected, and again shifted through those unfit for work. He asked the doctor to give her opinion. This was my good fortune. though I was not excited. When a person gets to this feeble condition, she does not care what happens to her.

The doctor came and looked at the sick ones. When my turn came, the commandant asked her: "What does she have?" To which the doctor responded: "Oh, she only has a rash (Hulsenausschlag), she can work." And they sent me back to the barracks, where my friends were excitedly waiting for me, and gave a sigh of relief when I returned. Quite frankly, only then did I realize what kind of danger my life had been in.

My poor sister-in-law was taken away with the others on a freezing, cold day. From these unfortunates they took their coats, stockings and everything that would protect them a little from the dreadful cold in the damp wagons; and they sent the group on their way. Supposedly to Bergen-Belsen. None of them ever came back.

There were always a lot of sick people. My friend, once got blood poisoning from a small scratch in the factory. Lori, at that time was also very decent and did everything to stop the infection. At another time however, without any reason, she declared her as having tuberculosis, when she asked for medicine for her mouth problem. She had to escape from the sickroom so that the doctor would not send her to the hospital, which most likely would lead to transportation. Often she was untrustworthy and odd toward the sick.

Christmas and New Year had long passed. It was a beautiful winter day. Everything was white with snow. Toward evening, half an hour before we went to work, we were always allowed to come out of the barrack into the fresh air. At such times we walked back and forth in front of the lager chatting. On the other side of the fence we could see speeding trains. With heavy hearts we watched the trains as they moved swiftly by; inside were passengers who were free, and were not forced within tight enclosures; and we wondered whether we would ever travel again freely this way.

On one such nice winter day, a very long train went by in front of the lager. Inside the wagons, crammed together, male deportees were being transported from a neighboring ill-famed camp named Buchenwald. As we stood looking in groups at the passing train, many of the women and girls recognized their husbands and fathers, and they happily waved to each other. Just as the last wagon passed the boundary of the lager, the air-raid sirens indicated the approach of the attacking airplanes. Everybody hurried down to the air raid shelters. The planes did not concentrate their attack on the factory area. Soon they sounded the all-clear. A few days later, we learned that the planes' target was the passing train with the male deportees. The pilots could not guess that the freight train was concealing wretched prisoners; most likely they thought that it was a military transport, and with their heavy bombing destroyed the length of the train.

Meanwhile, a transport of male prisoners arrived from Buchenwald, so that they could increase productivity. These men were in dreadful shape. They were starved, in rags and frail. Their faces were skin and bones, with bulging eyes. They looked like a crowd of vagrants, as they stood in front of the barracks, inside the fenced-in enclosure. On some the clothes were so tight they almost split open, on some they were hanging so loose that two could have found room in them. They looked very pitiful. My friend and I had just come out of the barracks when we first saw the group of men. We just looked and looked at what they could do to human beings. My friend, by chance caught sight of her nephew in the group, and in her happiness started to wave to him. The commandant, it seems, was watching us from the window of his room. He ran out directly toward my friend and was not afraid to use his dog-whip. The poor little woman, when she noticed "Los", (as that is what we called the commandant among ourselves, as "Los" (Get on) was his favorite word), she started running down the steps into the underground gangway; but "Los" went after her, and caught her. To be sure, she thoroughly felt the beating on her emaciated body.

On another occasion, my friend and I went out, as we normally did, to walk a little in the fresh air before going to the factory. No sooner had we left the barrack, when a female soldier came toward us and asked what we were doing out here; already raising her hand ready to strike my face. I quickly defended myself by raising my arm, whereupon my friend felt the hard hand on her face, that left its mark that was visible for the whole day. We never knew why, how and from where we would get the beatings.

The commandant's special pleasure was to use his hands and whip against the deportees. Once the washroom was out of order, because the gypsy women had washed their clothes and all the drains had clogged up. It was winter and cold. One of the deportees had obtained a pail and they gave it to each other to use. When it was my turn, I took the pail and went out to the area in front of the barrack, where they had a water reservoir. Since the water in the reservoir was frozen; with the help of my friend, I broke the ice and drew the water. In the block, I washed myself from head to toe, and I took the used water out to empty it into the drain. Then I brought the pail back to give it to another companion of mine.

In that instant I heard somebody yell "Hey, Hey!". I did not know who that was intended for; I turned around and saw a Polish woman approaching with the commandant and she pointed at me: "There she is." I stopped and meanwhile the two of them caught up with me. Los asked me: "What did you do?" I didn't even have a chance to answer when I got two such immense slaps on my face that they made me dizzy. I did not say anything, just turned around and started for my bunk. Meanwhile I felt a kick, also destined for me by our leader. To this day, I don't know why I got the slaps, I only know that my face was burning so from shame, that I did not even feel the pain. My spirit was totally broken down, though this was not the first time they beat me during my stay in Germany. I did not say anything all day, I never felt myself so defenseless. To my friends, my silence was unusual; and at night they asked me what had happened. Then I told them what had happened. We kept our silence... The commandant's heavy hand could be felt by everyone.

In the meantime, amid the bitter suffering, there were some who tried to cheer up the working lager. With the commandant's consent, every 3-4 weeks, after Christmas, little cultural shows were arranged by the women and girls in the barrack, prior to going to sleep. At such times; great excitement started days before the show. Everyone was happy that their cultural needs could be met in this tiny way, and a little change was made in their tedious lives. Accordingly, and since they did not have anything else at their disposal except their memories, the more talented ones put together such a first rate program, that it would have stood out any place. There were recitations of poems. One very talented performer was among us, who knew how to assemble her program very well, and everyone was brought to tears by her performance. She did not just recite her poems, but felt them. In dead silence, holding our breath, we listened to her poems. They were mostly on Jewish subjects, which reminded us of the great tragedy to our race. There were musical numbers, vocal numbers, dance scenes. Everyone produced her best talent.

Once a parody of "The Human Tragedy" (a classical Hungarian Drama) was produced with such wit that we totally forgot where we were, because we enjoyed the performance so much. I can say that these productions became an oasis in our dismal lives. After these shows, we once again returned to the present, and continued our miserable existence.

The air raid sirens sounded more and more often. The fighting was getting closer to the border of Thuringia. At 6 o'clock one evening, the deportees started toward the factory in the usual "five to a line" in order to replace the day workers. It was a nice day in early spring. The yards around the factory were full of flowering fruit trees. The air was filled with fragrance. The sun's rays were already low in the horizon, when we headed toward the factory. We filled our lungs by inhaling the mild fresh spring air. In a few minutes we would again be forced into the factory halls' dusty, acrid-smelling environment.

We were getting close to the factory building; its open gate seemed to swallow the immense group of workers; as we approached five to a line and stepped through the large gate. Here everyone dispersed immediately, and hurried to their work station to continue the work that the day-workers had left behind. With feverish speed, the toiling started anew. The supervisors rushed the women and girls. The machines rattled. Human voices were not audible due to the noise of the machines, which was deafening

Through the open door one could see the sun's fiery disc as it disappeared over the horizon and the reflection of its burning rays painted the sky red as if a mighty sea of flames had covered it. It suddenly became dark. The workhall door was closed. The workers worked. The supervisors supervised to make sure that the prisoners completed the required amount of work. Amidst the rattling machines, the workers, proceeding at a feverish pace, were completing the work imposed on them.

In the hall of the factory, only women were working, and they were performing the hardest work; work which would have been too much even for a man. Into the furnace they shoveled the raw materials, compressed the various-sized shell casings, hauled the heavy crates with the finished product. Here they took exact measurements of the shell casings; there they gave a glossy surface to them; they sorted them and finally took the full crates to the warehouse, from where they were transported to another hall and filled with explosives and sealed.

It was getting close to midnight. All at once, over the noise of the machines, the sound of airplanes could be heard. The workers listened and a few minutes later, the air raid sirens started howling. The airplanes must have gotten close to the factory. The workers were not allowed to go down to the air raid shelters until the third alert. Everybody listened as they worked. The noise of the airplanes was getting louder. The air raid alert sounded for the second time, and immediately after that again. The supervisors, deathly pale, were already running to the air raid shelter. After them, the prisoners. The airplanes in a large close formation occupied the space over the terrain. With their rumbling noise, the airplanes seemed to warn the workers quickly, quickly to take flight.

Everyone took their place in the underground shelter, which at one time had served as the wash-up place for the workers. Everybody paid terrified attention. Even here the rumbling of the airplanes could be heard. Suddenly, in the deadly silence, the enormous explosion of a bomb could be heard and felt. After that, came many more. The place where we stood was shaking, the iron windows and doors rattled. An immense crash!

The prisoners were holding and squeezing each other's arms in fear. There were those who prayed, there were those who began to cry from fear. There was the wife of a doctor from Gyor, who, when I held her hand tight and comforted her, kissed my hand; she was beside herself. The stronger ones comforted the weaker ones, and they convulsively squeezed each other's hands. Then there was silence. We could still hear the roar of the departing planes, but less and less. Then the noise stopped completely. Now deafening stillness. Nobody dared utter a word. After a few minutes they turned on the emergency lights, because the electric lights failed to work. The supervisors with pale faces went up to the factory to survey the damage. They came back even paler. They called on the workers to follow them in line, but with caution. Through an underground walkway, they led us to an exit, that was unfamiliar to us. We arrived in the open air. The air was full of burning odors, drifting soot and flying ashes. Something must have happened to the factory, we thought with satisfaction, mostly because we thought we would then not have to go to work. We could at least rest for a few days. We had barely gone a few steps when there was a powerful explosion behind us. Approximately three kilometers away, an oil refinery had been hit and only exploded now.

Slowly, carefully, we took our steps in the dark, as our march left the factory building. Above us, the starless sky; around us the menacing darkness. The gigantic column of flame over the oil refinery was followed by a thick cloud of smoke. It gradually spread almost across the whole sky, pushing the air down so that it lay heavy on our chest and lungs. In the dark, we groped our way until we finally arrived at the barracks. Here the agitated day workers were waiting for the night workers. They were afraid that something had happened to us. Now that we had arrived without losing anybody, they could not stop asking questions. What happened? Did the factory get a direct hit? The noise of the explosion had carried this far and the blast could even be felt here. Everyone talked at once. When we got tired of talking about what had happened, we went to sleep with the hope that perhaps tomorrow we would not have to work in the factory after what had happened. There was no doubt that we needed the rest. For months we had worked without stopping, with the absolute minimal quantity of food for nourishment. Certainly, we were in bad shape both physically and mentally.

The sun was already high in the sky when we woke up. The usual reveille had not sounded. We again started to discuss the previous night's happenings, until the inspector called upon the day-workers to go to work in the factory. We looked at each other with disappointment. Had nothing happened to the factory building? There was no time for thinking, because the soldier hurried the prisoners to work.

Finally the march started toward the factory complex. The factory was made up of many buildings, spread over a large area. As the prisoners went by the buildings, they noticed the broken windows caused by the blast. As they got closer and closer to their own workplace, they noticed more and more devastation of the buildings. Almost in good spirits, they arrived at that wing of the factory where they had been toiling for months.

The large gate had been torn off by the blast, every window broken, the glass wall dividers were totally torn away. The floor was full of glass pieces and wood chips. This part of the factory was not hit, but the blast of the bombs dropped nearby, made it totally unusable.

The prisoners started to clean up the fragments. This work required two days. After that, we got permission to rest for a few days. If you can call people happy under such circumstances, then we were that. We no longer cared that they measured our food allotments more and more tightly, although we were in very bad condition. But we did not have to work, and secretly we felt that the war could not last too much longer.

The Germans nevertheless fixed the factory quickly. For them the work was urgent. The windows everywhere were replaced with wooden boards and thick paper plates. The factory again became a functioning area for the prisoners. Everything started again from the beginning, or rather continued onward. Already the great excitement of the bombing raid was forgotten, everything returned to the old way.

Only the commandant was a little more subdued. He used the whip less and less. He cursed us less and less. It appeared that he was better informed of how the war was going than we were. He was no longer shouting "lausige Juden" or "dr...Juden. Now he was satisfied to say with due emphasis: "Ihr Weiswasch". We suspected that things were not going well on the German side, since they expressed themselves so mildly. He felt that he had better watch out.

This is the way it went for weeks. In the factory we could observe the shortage of raw materials. They were now reworking the rejected materials. The supervisors no longer urged us to work faster. Later they even ran out of the rejected materials. They now allowed more freedom to the workers. We could talk to each other quietly. The only exception was when the supervisor came into the hall. Then we were required to work feverishly, but it was for appearances only. After all, there was nothing to work on; the completed work returned for selection, and then we had to do it over again.

The supervisors were fooling themselves. Of course they were aware of the level of their raw material inventory and our productivity. Like everywhere else in Germany, here too there was nothing more than delusion and self-deception. The supervisors and free prisoners, once in a while made a slip of the tongue. The war was coming to an end. The news of more and more battlefield losses came back to us.

The Fuhrer wanted to try one final experiment; he was getting ready for poison gas warfare. The supervisors and overseers received gas masks, which they always had to take with them, because they could never tell when they would need it. It seemed these were the final weeks of the war. The supervisors bitterly gave themselves away, "We will all die". They started scolding and cursing their Leader. They knew that we, prisoners would not inform on them.

There were new instructions in the barracks. The commandant ordered that a large square portion of the back of the prisoners' uniform be cut out and replaced by a colored patch. Now escapes were occurring often and therefore we had to wear this colored patch as a form of identification. The Polish women were brave and were able to make plans for escaping. They knew that the fighting was at the border of Thuringia. If their escape was successful, they could easily get to the battlefield, and then they could be free. Many were successful. The commandant tightened the security. Every few steps, instead of S.S. soldiers (because of their shortage), old Reichswehr soldiers stood guard. One day, two Polish women were brought back by the soldiers, from outside the lager. The commandant punished them horribly, the poor things. He had their hair cut bald, and beat them with his dog-whip till their heads and bodies were completely covered with blood. After that, as a deterring example, he made them stand in the camp's open area for 12 hours a day. This lasted for many days. These unfortunate women stood under the blazing sun, alone, in this manner, with hands bound behind their backs, like those condemned. We were horrified whenever we looked at them with their bald, bloody heads.

One day, they took the picture of Hitler off the wall in the factory. At this point, everyone surmised that the fighting was getting close. That day a very large air raid covered the city with carpet-raid bombing. Everyone was deathly pale as they ran to the air raid shelter. At this time the factory got its coup-de-grace. When the workers came out of the air raid shelter, the factory was the picture of destruction.

Not only the factory but the barracks were in a sorry state. The blast of the explosion had taken off the roof. The windows and floor were full of debris. It was early spring; the nights were very cold. The workers were shivering in their bunks in the roofless barracks. Many went down to the air raid shelter to sleep: on the floor, in the chairs, on the benches, wherever they could find a place for themselves. Order was totally disrupted. We seldom got food, and without any predictable system. But this only lasted for a few days. The American army was getting closer and closer. From the distance you could hear the detonation of the machineguns.

One morning, the commandant gave an order that everyone be ready. The working lager would be evacuated. There was a lot of excitement among the workers at that declaration. One rumor followed the other. Everyone wanted to know more than anyone else.

Finally, through the supervisor, we were told that Czechoslovakia was our destination -- by foot. The weakened women and girls received the news in despair. How could we survive the journey in our condition? The Germans wanted to further hassle this exhausted, emaciated, worked-to-death crowd.. Since they still felt a little domination over us, they would not want to make the deportees freedom come easy. However, they knew that their fate had been sealed. The deportees knew now that a long bitter road was ahead of them, but they suspected that if they survived this, the day of freedom was not far off. We were ready for the trip by late evening.

The Liberation of the Working-Lager

It was eight o'clock in the evening. The entire lager's occupants stood ready to march. Approximately 2500 people. They were no longer humans. Emaciated and in rags, they could hardly be recognized as human forms. As the American army approached, the camp leadership got the order: "Immediately leave the workplace and start marching in the opposite direction of the fighting front." We, the camp workers, the unfortunate deportees, were already standing in rows of five, with armed S.S. soldiers on the side. The march started. We were marching for more than five hours, when escaping tanks, cars with German officers, then trucks with German enlisted men, went rumbling towards us

A peculiar feeling came over us. Where are they taking us? Toward the front? All of a sudden they stopped us. This was when the leaders came to their senses. By mistake, in their big excitement, they had gone in the opposite direction than where they had been ordered to go. In fear they clutched their heads, and for a time they stood bewildered. They had had strict marching orders and now they were nervously deliberating on how they could have made such a mistake. They did not have much time for discussion. The deserters, in total confusion were coming toward us. All of a sudden they turned us around. Now they were moving us at a fast tempo, in order to gain time. Many of the deportees had thrown away their superfluous loads: first of all their dishes, right under the escaping vehicles' wheels, with a good feeling of revenge. These dishes were the silent witnesses of the wretched food, the salt-less carrot soup, which had been given us once a day, for months after a long and exhausting 12-hour workday.

We had walked for hours, we were tired, heavy with our own loads. We walked all night long, half asleep, hungry and weak. The leaders of our group were eating during the march; but they ignored us and our hunger. We had only a few cabbage leaves that we had been able to pick off the floor during the emptying of the lager and had saved, so as to have something to put in our mouths during the trip, to allay our thirst.

Before we left the lager, and were waiting in lines of five, for the march to begin; we noticed how they threw out enormous amounts of cabbages, turnips and potatoes from the provision warehouse. But it did not occur to the leader, to distribute it among the workers, or maybe he did not want to; he preferred to allow the provisions to rot on the ground. Only those who stood at the edge of the line, close to the warehouse, could partake of these treasures. Only they could slip out of the line now and then, and quickly grab a piece of food while the guard was not looking.

And so we stumbled along, propping each other up, by now feeling nothing. Our feet performed automatically, according to accustomed movement. It was pitch dark. The moon hid behind the clouds, as if ashamed.

We kept going through burning villages, the air was full of ash and the smell of burned animal flesh. We saw crashed planes still burning, and cars in flames. They lit up the road.

It was early morning. We were still walking. We walked without stopping. In the villages and cities, the windows were full of curious people watching us. There were some who looked at us with compassion; there were others who looked with disdain. Occasionally, a door would open, and a woman, out of humane feelings or out of pity, would offer the wretched souls marching nearby a pitcher of warm coffee. They probably never realized how much good they did with this gesture.

It was nine o'clock in the morning. The leaders were relieved. They gave our tired group ten minutes to rest. For us, wretched ones, who were now accustomed to the mechanical action of marching, this little rest had an unfortunate reaction. We were unable to keep up with the previously achieved tempo. Still, we kept dragging ourselves along. We had no choice for next to us, and behind us, were armed guards. They were watching us vigilantly. Whenever they noticed that among the weary marchers there were those who had lost all strength, and could no longer continue to march; they simply shot them dead. Numerous corpses marked the route of the marchers.

In the meantime, one could see more and more often now, civilian escapees, with horse-drawn carriages, small hand-pushed four-wheel carts, laden with backpacks, hastily making their way. Almost all were women and children. What on earth had possessed them to be so sadistic; a people who could bring so many children into the world (and it can be assumed that it was done out of their great desire for and love of children) could on the other hand, exterminate hundreds of thousands of innocent children and mothers, simply because their paranoid leader, in his madness, thought that that was the way to totally destroy his imaginary enemy.

In spite of all that, he lost everything. He lost the war, destroyed his country and himself. But he was not able to destroy his imaginary enemy, because he did not have either enough strength or time.

The Americans were very close by now. In spite of this, we did not surmise that we were on the doorstep of liberation. We could not guess that due to our involuntary slow march, and the error in direction, we had gained much time and with that our life. As we later learned, the German leadership had given orders that when we arrived to a certain place, our group was to be eliminated, as were many others. The Germans paid a lot of attention to this.

We could now hear the American machine guns, the detonation of the shells, the shrapnels' impact. The civilian population was in full flight. It was noon. The trudging crowd arrived at a small town in Saxony. Here, the lager leader with the women soldiers who earlier had arrived by cars, awaited us. We were directed to the main square where we stopped. That is, we would have stopped, but we did not have the strength. We fell down out of weariness and for many minutes we stayed without moving.

They stood us up for bread distribution: five to a line. These were orders, without consideration for our exhausted condition. Because order and discipline must be maintained at all times. This was the strength of the Germans. And in expectation of getting bread, we were ready to comply. After making us stand around for about half an hour, they started to distribute about 25 decagrams (a little more than 1/2 pound) to every person. How we ate!! We ravenously consumed the bread so that in a few minutes not even the crumbs remained.

Above our heads, airplanes were circling. We could hear the boom of the cannons and the rattle of the machine-guns coming ever closer. The leaders were getting very uncomfortable. They huddled together excitedly to discuss what to do next. The women soldiers disappeared, only to reappear in a few minutes in civilian clothing; so that now, if the situation required it, they could disappear into the crowd incognito. They were worried. They had reason to worry. Their contemptible treatment of the deportees rivaled that of the most depraved S.S. soldiers.

The commandant suddenly made us stand up. Of course, in the usual five to a line configuration. They started us toward the side of a mountain, and we dragged ourselves onward. We did not know what fate was waiting for us.

The commandant, with his pale face, pushed his bicycle. We could not imagine how he had obtained one so fast. Fastened to his bicycle was a package. He gave us directions. When we arrived to the side of the mountain, he led us up to a pretty steep place, where he separated the female and male prisoners. Since order must be maintained, and morals as well, it seemed that at this moment, that was his greatest concern... He entrusted the groups to the armed guards. They were not S.S. soldiers, because the S.S. had disappeared so fast, that we did not even realize that they had left. The leader then exchanged his army uniform for civilian clothes, taken from the little package; then with great speed, he peddled away on his bicycle.

The guards watched the prisoners for a while. Later, when they noticed their leaders' disappearance, they approached us in a friendly manner. Probably, they were aware that the situation of the Germans was not the best. They were protecting themselves against the future, wanting us to believe that they always felt kindly toward the prisoners, but that they were forced to be soldiers. They told us that the S.S. soldiers had now escaped; that they were the ones who beat, cursed, and shot the unlucky deportees who were helpless in their charge. Now that they felt the ground move under their feet, the cowards had ran away.

Meanwhile, it started raining. The sky was covered with clouds. The rain gushed forth as though water was pouring from a pail. A whole squadron of airplanes were circling above, and were continuously dropping their bombs. In the meantime, the evening was closing in.

In the small town, sheets of fire rose toward the sky. Rifle fire, machine gun rattles, bomb impacts were heard non-stop. We lay still, tightly next to each other on the wet, cold ground. We were soaked thoroughly by the rain but we dared not move. Every move could have cost us our lives. From above, the dive-bombers tried to destroy everything by carpet-bombing. They could not see from there that we, the unlucky souls lying there, were waiting for their liberation; and now we did not want to die. Now we had a great desire to live. If the Americans succeeded, that would be a sign of our liberation.

Daybreak. The fighting was still going on, but noticeably, one could hear the roar of the canons less often, and the rattle of the machine guns as well. All of a sudden it was quiet. Unusually quiet...Abruptly, trumpets sounded, liberated, exalted.

Our gloomy temperament still had a hold on us. Who really knew which side was stronger. If the Germans gained even a half hour of time, we would have felt it. Vengeance lived in the Germans. The first thing they would do would be to destroy us defenseless people. But the silence continued. The noise of the artillery could still be heard, but only in the far distance. Now, you could hear the very noisy tanks rumbling as they approached. Just once in a while, at first; then more often. Finally with a never ceasing rattle.

We looked around. Not a single guard was anywhere to be found. Some of the male prisoners undertook to find out what had happened in the town. We held our breaths waiting for the news. Before a half hour had passed, a jubilant cry could be heard from down the mountain road, all the way up to us: "We are free. Come on down. The Americans are here."

All at once, we felt liberated. The young ones started running down the side of the mountain. Yesterday's weariness was gone. Full of life, full of vitality, the future was theirs.

One could see the suffering of the past on the older ones, even though they were wearily smiling. We could not be carefree and happy. We had become immune toward all feelings. But we followed the young ones.

Then we noticed on the wide road at the bottom of the hill, the victorious American soldiers, on top of their huge lumbering tanks. They were waving at us in a most friendly manner. We looked around in wonder. Could this be real? We had imagined our liberation so many times; now we did not know whether we were dreaming or awake. We looked around. We could not see a single armed guard near us. We began to believe our eyes.

The knowledge of free movement, the feeling of deliverance, brought us such joy, that we happily hugged each other: our friends and fellow sufferers. There were some who in their happiness began to cry... Slowly, slowly we got some of our energy back. We became conscious of our human needs.

We were tired and hungry. Now we had to take care of ourselves. We were totally dazed in the first few moments. How should we begin? We would like to lie down. We went to the nearby houses, asking for lodging. We, ragged, dirty, starved, and exhausted were received by the occupants distrustfully. They did not want to let us into their homes

When this became known to the commanding officer of the victorious soldiers, he gave out a declaration: "Every German family is required to give the liberated people, accommodations and food until further notice." Then every door opened up. They were being ordered, and in their fear they went along with every order. Now we had a roof over our heads. We could wash up and we could eat as well. The starved people ate. They ate enormous portions. They could not stop themselves. They had starved for so long: and so they ate as if trying to make up for all that they had missed. The Germans had to give everything to satisfy the hungry people. Indeed the reaction to the overeating soon became evident. The starved and weakened constitutions could not handle the overburdened stomachs. Many got sick. They were in bed for days with a high fever. There were some who could not overcome the high fever and died before they regained consciousness.

The commander of the American occupying forces gave us normal quarters and guaranteed our provisions. We started to live normal lives. Slowly, slowly, we started to gather our strength and regain our human form. We got shoes and clothes. Extremely happy, we took off our striped rags, and with deep disgust, we threw them away or burned them so that not even a trace would remain to remind us of our recent suffering.

The American commandant who whole-heartedly represented the deportees' interest, looked us up in our lodgings and questioned our self-appointed leader: "Did the Germans pay you for your work in the factory?" It was a strange question; this possibility had not even crossed our minds, and with amazement our leader answered "no!" He said he would act to obtain compensation for us. A few days later, he notified us that the leadership in the factory would satisfy our legal rights; and shortly, they would deliver clothes and food to us by truck..

In the meantime the peace conferences had started, and they decided which areas would be occupied by the Americans and which by the Russians.

Waldenburg, the town where we were liberated was cut in two by a small river. One part of the liberated people were quartered on one side of the river in a school house, the others, on the other side of the river in a large empty hotel, located in the middle of a large park, and at one time had been used as a summer resort.

I myself belonged to the second group. It was our misfortune that our side of the river was to be occupied by the Russians. Our situation changed immediately. It was exactly at this time that the Americans sent large trucks filled with clothing and food from the Germans in exchange for our work. But unfortunately by this time, Russian soldiers were guarding the bridge that connected the two parts of the town; and they had strict orders that the material sent to us from the American side was not to be given to the prisoners and was to be seized.

Now that physically we had recovered a little, we started to wonder. What had happened to our dear ones? Where were they? All of a sudden we felt such longing toward our relatives, that under any circumstances we wanted to return to our homeland, to our homes, so that we could meet with our families. At the time, we could not believe, did not know, and nobody dared to think that the worst could be true. Everybody was hoping. That hope gave us strength to return to our homeland, to our old homes. We knew that that would be the only possibility for those who had remained alive to find each other.

In the meantime our food supply was used up and the Russians stopped all provisions to us. They gave orders that we must leave our quarters in three days and give them back to their German owners. We must take care of ourselves. Our leader went to see the Russian commandant and asked for permission to return to our homes in Hungary.

The reply was very short: "You can go home through Odessa. For this purpose, in light of the shortage of railroad transportation, we can offer you trucks driven by Russians. Otherwise you can stay here." We sat down to discuss the situation and the possibilities. If we stayed here in enemy territory, we did not know how to start without having any rights. If we allowed the Russians to take us through Russia, we might never get back to the Hungarian border. Our leader was a resourceful young man from Pest who made the following statement: "I know the shortest way to return to our homeland. Those who trust me and my leadership may come with me. I will help as much as I can; but you should not make it harder for me by disagreeing with my decisions. Those who are willing to go along with this must understand that we are at the beginning of a very trying trip." All of us answered happily with a "Yes".

The next day, after a long meeting with the Russians, he arranged that on the following morning, two very large trucks would be made available to us, with a strict order that the Russian leader's orders must be strictly adhered to.

The next morning we awoke early, gathered our large and small packages and waited for our time of departure. The trucks arrived at 9AM. We crowded into the trucks. There were a lot of us and only by standing could we find enough room. Happily we started toward our prescribed destination. After a few hours' travel, we arrived at the suburbs of Chemnitz, where we stopped in front of the Russian headquarters.

Our leader who spoke good Slovakian was able to make himself understood by the Russians. After much arguing and reasoning, they gave us permission to spend two hours in town to look around and obtain provisions.

Our leader had his own plan. We entered the town. Whole city blocks were bombed out. We hardly saw any people. After much difficulty, we were able to get some information as to where the temporary railroad station was located. After much wandering, we finally found the place. It was located in an area where a few railroad tracks ran through a bombed out area. Behind the tracks stood a little railroad building. We sat on the rubble, which lay around on the ground, and waited for the arrival of the first train. Shortly, a local locomotive arrived with much noise and sound of bells. While the few passengers disembarked, at a sign from our leader, we climbed on the first open freight car without asking anyone for permission.

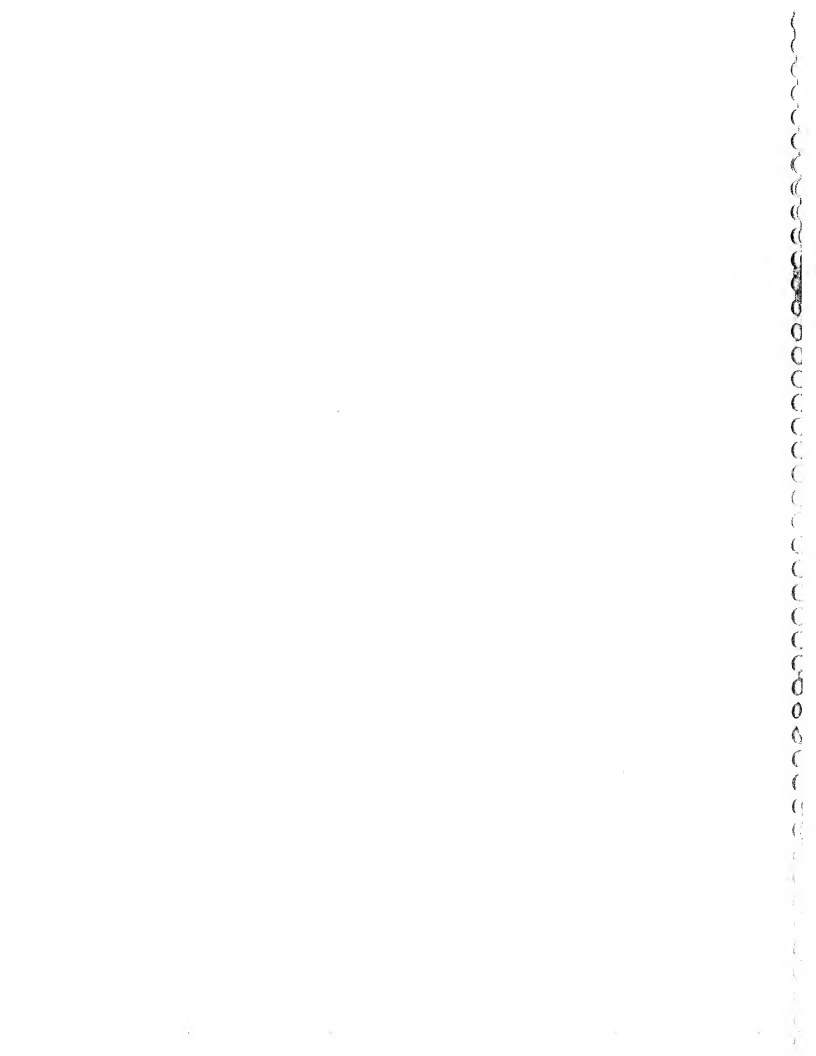
From there on, at almost every larger railroad station, we changed trains so that the Russians could not trace us. The train engineers, after some arguments and threats from us, that we would press charges against them, allowed us to clamber up, here onto a cattle car, there onto a freight car, here onto a poultry car. Under these conditions, and after a few days of exhausting travel; worn out but in good spirits, we arrived to Dresden.

We were appalled by our first impression, but then with some satisfaction we took note of the once beautiful city, now with completely deserted streets, burned out buildings, and walls rising to the sky, without roofs and windows. The bombers had made a perfect job of it. We did not meet a single person as we went across the town. To our luck, when we arrived at the railroad station, they informed us in what direction we should go to catch the right train that would take us toward the Czech border. At last, after an exhausting week of travel, we crossed the Czech border.

Here in a different atmosphere we could continue our travels. The people were well-disposed toward us and they were friendly. Where they could, they helped us out with food; and gave good advice, when they found out where we had come from and where we were going. In Prague, we came under the protection of the Red Cross, who helped us with money and directed our travel onward.

After two days of rest, full of hope, we got on a train that was rushing toward our homeland through Bratislava. Toward our homeland that was now willing to take us back. Toward our homeland which a year ago had turned its back on us and handed us over to the Nazis. Toward our homeland that now was ready to give us back our home. Toward our homeland, that could never give us back our parents, our children, our siblings and our innocent infants. Toward our homeland that gave back our homes now plundered and ruined so that nothing could remind us of the past, of the happy times, when a warm family home and children's laughter were waiting for us at the end of the day.

But life must go on, though the memories can never be erased.



Personalausweis

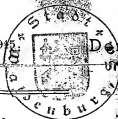
Herr/Frau/Frl. **Dr. Ladislaus Simon**, geb. **Gitta Kolm**
 geboren am **23.4.1905** in **Moson**
 wurde wegen Zugehörigkeit zum Judentum **HUNGARY** nach Deutschland
 deportiert und im Konzentrationslager (Vernichtungslager) **AUSCHWITZ**
 interniert. Am 13. 4. 1945 wurde er — sie von der H nach Waldenburg/Sa. verschleppt
 und hier von den amerikanischen Truppen befreit. Sämtliche Personalausweise und
 Dokumente wurden im Konzentrationslager abgenommen.
 Alle Behörden werden um weitgehendste Hilfe gebeten.

Personbeschreibung:

Fingerabdrücke:

Haar: **grau** linker / rechter
 Augen: **Blau** (left) (right)
 Gesichtsform: **Oval** Daumen
 Größe: **170 cm** (thumb)
 Besondere Kennzeichen:

Waldenburg, Sa., den 21. Mai 1945



Identity card

Mr./Mrs./Miss **Dr. Ladislaus Simon** born on the **23.4.1905**
 in **Moson** was because being a Jew deported
 from **HUNGARY** to Germany and interned in the concentration
 camp at **AUSCHWITZ**. On the 13th 4. 1945 he — she was brought by
 the H to Waldenburg/Sa. and released here by the american troops.
 All identification proofs and documents were taken away at the concentration camp.
 All authorities are kindly asked to give the utmost help.

Description of the person:

Hair: **Grey**
 Eyes: **Blue**
 Form of the face: **Oval**
 Height: **170 cm**
 Special signs:

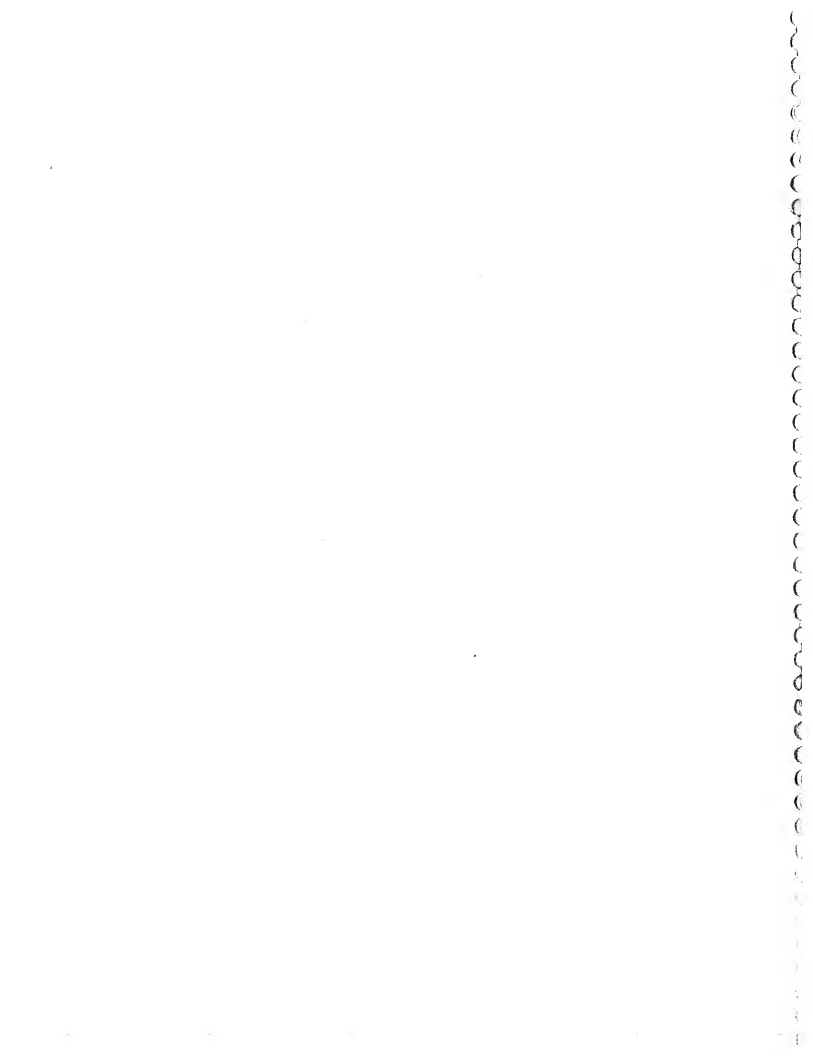
Waldenburg, Sa., 21th May 1945.

Buchdruckerei E. Kästner, Waldenburg Sa.



The Mayor
 (signature)





Unterzeichneter, Frau Stanislaus Simon, geb. Gitta Kolm,
geb. 23. April 1905 in Moson (Ungarn), angeblich ungarische
Staatsangehörige, erklärt es stattlich, daß sich ihre sämt-
lichen Ausweis-papiere im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz befinden.
Häftlings-Nr. 29 401.

Genannte wurde am 13. April 1945 durch die SS. von Altenburg, Thür-
ingen nach Waldenburg, Sa., transportiert und von den Amerikanern
freigegeben.



Waldenburg, den 17. Mai 1945.

Der Bürgermeister.

I.A. Thierbach, zug.

Stanislaus Simon

The undersigned, Stanislaus Simon,
nee Gitta Kolm, born 23 April 1905 at Moson (Hungary),
alleged of Hungarian nationality, declares on oath
that all her papers are at the concentration-camp
Auschwitz. Captive number 29 401.
She was brought by the SS from Altenburg Thüringen,
to Waldenburg Saxony on the 13 April 1945 and here
released by the American troops.

Stanislaus Simon

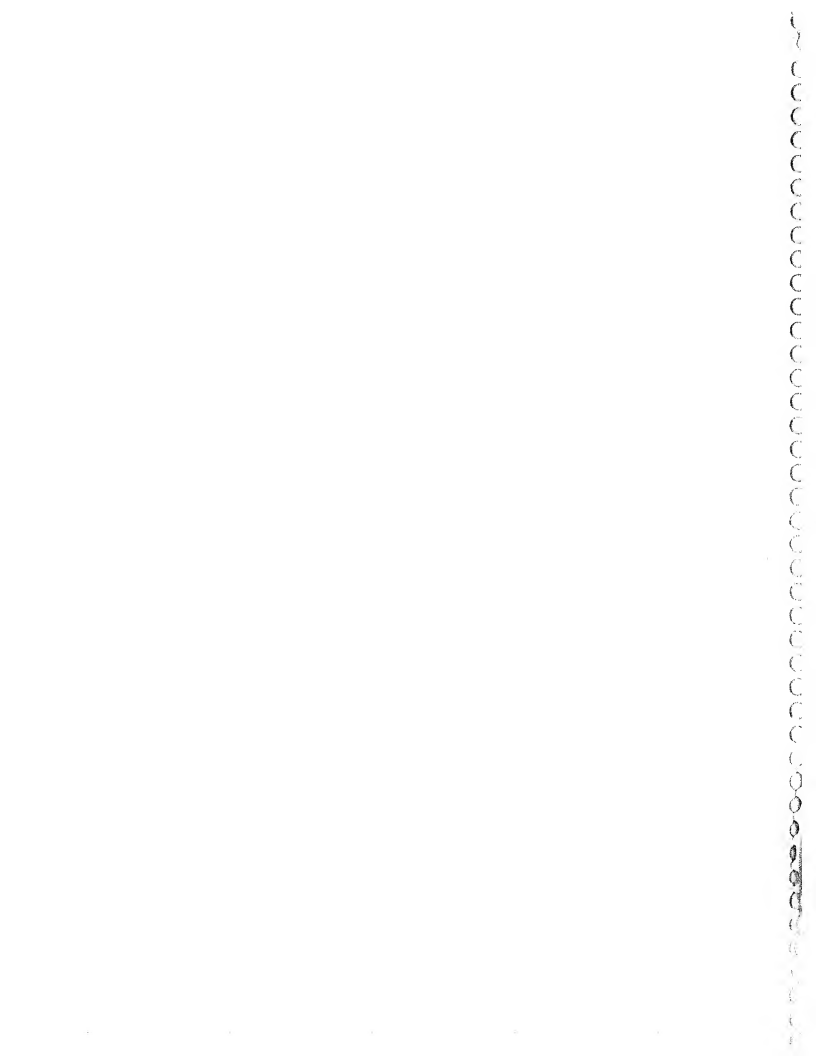
Waldenburg, den 17. Mai 1945

Der Bürgermeister.

I.A. Thierbach, zugest.

Translator:

Herbert Weiser



Thumbnail Biography of Gitti Simon

Gitti was born Margit Kohn in Moson, Hungary on April 23, 1899 to Bernat Kohn and his wife, Hermina (Schonfeld). She was their third child and oldest daughter in a family of six children. Moson was at that time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Bernat and Hermina usually spoke German to each other as that was the language of Austria.

Bernat owned a men's clothing store on the main street of Moson. He and his family lived in an apartment above the store. He was a handsome man and well respected in his community. Hermina was a lovely, refined lady, raised her children well and kept a kosher home.

Gitti, a beautiful young girl, fell deeply in love with a young orthodox man, but his mother refused to let them marry for she did not consider Gitti's family observant enough. This nearly broke Gitti's heart. She soon met David Barta, a man 19 years her senior, and at the age of 22, married him. She bore twin sons, both of who were stillborn. David Barta died in August 1939.

She married Dr. Laszlo (Laci) Simon on February 20, 1943 in Szekesfehervar. He was a urologist and the same age as Gitti. Not having any children of their own, she was very close to her nephew and three nieces who lived nearby; especially her oldest niece, Jutka (Judith) who frequently stayed with Gitti during her short life.

A year after her marriage to Laci, they were both taken to Auschwitz and separated from each other, but fortunately they both managed to survive, and were reunited after the war. Her younger twin sisters, Olci (Olga) and Irene, however were less lucky. They lost their lives in Auschwitz, as did their husbands and all four children.

After the war, Gitti and Laci moved to Shanghai in 1947, with the help of her oldest brother, Ernest. They lived there for two years, before they once again had to leave; this time when the Communists took over China. They moved to Canada and settled in Toronto. Laci passed away in 1969, and Gitti died in 1993 at the age of 94.

She wrote her memoirs of that bitter year of the Holocaust in Hungary, while she lived in Shanghai (1947 to 1949) only a few years after experiencing those terrible events. After that, she rarely spoke of the past and never mentioned having written about her experiences. The memoirs were found among her things, after she passed away. No one in the family who survived her, knew of their existence.

Note: The documents accompanying this memoir show her maiden name as Kolm, instead of Kohn, and her year of birth as 1905, instead of 1899. The first is an error, the second was deliberate: she was afraid that the Nazis would consider her too old to work and would exterminate her, if they knew her true age; and immediately after the war she hesitated to change her story.

